



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

BLM Safford Field Office and Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area Recreation Fee Sites and Areas Business Plan



September 2024

BLM Safford Field Office and Gila Box RNCA Recreation Sites and Areas Business Plan
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Recommendations, Reviews, and Approvals

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This business plan was prepared by the Bureau of Land Management's Safford Field Office pursuant to the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act of 2004 (16 U.S.C. 6801-6814) and BLM recreation fee program policies. It establishes future management goals and priorities for Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness, Fourmile Canyon Recreation Site, Hot Well Dunes Recreation Area, Gila River Boat Put-In, Owl Creek Campground, Riverview Campground, and the Indian Bread Rocks Recreation Area within the Safford Field Office.



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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In Reply Refer to:
2932 (G010, G011)

Dear Reader,

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Safford Field Office (SFO) has prepared this draft business plan to identify objectives and strategies for collecting recreation fees, and to demonstrate the business need and public benefit of doing so. This draft business plan describes the current and proposed fee rates, the basis for the fees, and how BLM uses the fee revenue to enhance visitor experience. The BLM SFO currently collects fees at seven sites or areas and is seeking to establish fees at an eighth location in the SFO.

This draft business plan has been prepared in compliance with the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) of 2004 which authorizes the BLM to collect and expend fees at the site of collection to help protect resources, provide for public health and safety, and provide benefits and services to the visitor. The following table outlines all current and proposed fee sites or areas being considered for addition or modification under this plan. One existing fee site, the Flying W Group Day Use Area, will not require a fee modification and the rationale is provided in Section 9, Analysis of Recreation Fee Rates.

Table 1: Breakdown of Current/Proposed Fees and Proposed New/Modified Fees

| Current or Proposed Fee Site/Area | Current Fees | Proposed New or Modified Fees |
|--|---|--|
| Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness | \$5.00 per person/day or overnight | \$12 per person/day or overnight |
| Fourmile Canyon Recreation Site | \$5.00 per site/night (w/two vehicles) \$2.00 per additional vehicle | \$15.00 per site/night (w/two vehicles) \$5.00 per additional vehicle |
| Flying W Group Day Use Area | \$50.00 for first 50 people \$75.00 for 50-75 people \$100.00 for 75-100 people | No change |
| Hot Well Dunes Recreation Area | \$3.00 per vehicle/day (day or overnight use) \$30.00 per vehicle annual pass (day or overnight use) | \$15.00 per vehicle (day or overnight use) \$80.00 per vehicle annual pass (day or overnight use) |
| Gila River Boat Put-In | \$3.00 per person/trip (up to 5 days) | \$8.00 per person/trip (up to 5 days) |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| Owl Creek Campground | \$5.00 per site/night (w/two vehicles) \$2.00 per additional vehicle | \$15.00 per site/night (w/two vehicles) \$5.00 per additional vehicle |
| Riverview Campground | \$5.00 per site/night (w/two vehicles) \$2.00 per additional vehicle | \$15.00 per site/night (w/two vehicles) \$5.00 per additional vehicle |
| Indian Bread Rocks Recreation Area (Proposed) | None | \$15.00 per site/night (w/two vehicles) \$5.00 per additional vehicle |

BLM’s Draft Safford Field Office and Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area Recreation Fee Sites and Areas Business Plan proposes the following:

- Increase fees at all but the Flying W Group Day Use Area.
- Establish a new fee site at the Indian Bread Rocks Recreation Area.
- Modify the fee type at the Hot Well Dunes Recreation Area from a recreation use permit to an individual special recreation permit.

This draft plan is available for a 45-day public comment period from September 6, 2024, to October 21, 2024. Comments received will be summarized in this document and may be used to modify the draft business plan, as appropriate. To ensure your comments will be considered, you must submit them in writing by the last day of the public comment period.

Please include your address, phone number, email address, or other contact information with your comment. Please be aware that your entire comment, including any personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. BLM will not consider anonymous comments. You may submit your comments in writing in the following ways:

- by email at blm_az_sfo_businessplan@blm.gov
- mail or hand-deliver comments to the Safford Field Office at 711 S. 14th Street, Suite 100, Safford, AZ 85546

Individuals in the United States who are deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, or have a speech disability may dial 711 (TTY, TDD, or TeleBraille) to access telecommunications relay services. Individuals outside the United States should use the relay services offered within their country to make international calls to the point-of-contact in the United States. The TTY is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to leave a message or question. You will receive a reply during normal hours.

If you have any questions regarding management of the recreation fee program, please contact Lamoni Mora, Outdoor Recreation Planner, by email at lmora@blm.gov (subject line: “recreation fee program”) or by phone at 928-348-4400, extension 4577.

Sincerely,

Sharisse L. Flatt

Field Manager

Draft

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1 Executive Summary

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Safford Field Office (SFO) prepared this proposed recreation fee business plan pursuant of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) of 2004 (P.L. 108-477, as amended) and BLM recreation permit and fee program policy (BLM Manual 2930). The FLREA (16 United States Code (U.S.C.) 6801 et seq.) provides the BLM the authority to charge and collect recreation fees for benefits and services provided to visitors. The FLREA also authorizes the BLM to retain collected fees locally, outlines how revenues may be used, and identifies specific limitations on recreation fees. Collected revenue may be expended for benefits and services such as facility repair, maintenance, enhancement, interpretation, visitor information and services, visitor needs assessments, signs, restoration, law enforcement related to public use and recreation, and operating or capital costs directly associated with the recreation fee program. FLREA (16 U.S.C. 6802(b)(1)) does not grant the authority for BLM to provide discounts or reduced recreation fees for local residents or other groups.

BLM Manual 2930 requires field offices to produce a business plan when establishing new fee areas and sites and developing or changing recreation fees. The draft business plan outlines the fee program for the identified location and thoroughly discusses and explains how fees are consistent with the criteria set forth in the FLREA. Business plans assist offices in determining appropriate fee rates, outlining the costs of administering fee programs, and identifying priorities for future fee program expenditures. The draft business plan also describes the public outreach to provide the public with opportunities to participate in the establishment or modification of recreation fees.

The SFO manages campground use through the issuance of a Recreation Use Permit (RUP) or an Individual Special Recreation Permit (ISRP) for 'Special Area' use for short-term recreation usage of specialized sites, facilities, and/or services which meet the fee collection criteria established by the FLREA. This draft business plan describes the recreation fee sites/areas, proposed fee changes, planned fee revenue expenditures, a financial analysis of fee charges for other similar recreation facilities and areas, and impacts of proposed fee changes.

After careful consideration of the current fee program, the anticipated revenues and expenditures, and comparison with other regional recreation providers, the SFO proposes the following fee modifications:

- Increase the ISRP fee for Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness from \$5.00 to \$12.00 per person, per day or night (16 U.S.C. 6802(h)).
- Increase the individual campsite RUP fee at Fourmile Canyon Recreation Site, Owl Creek Campground, and Riverview Campground from \$5.00 to \$15.00 per night and \$2.00 to \$5.00 per additional vehicle beyond two (expanded amenity fees, 16 U.S.C. 6802(g)(2)(A)).
- At the Hot Well Dunes Recreation Area (HWDRA), change the fee type from a \$3.00 standard amenity recreation fee (16 U.S.C. 6802 (f)(4)) to an ISRP (16 U.S.C. 6802(h)),

and increase the fee to \$15.00 per vehicle, per day or night with the option for an annual site pass (16 U.S.C. 6804(c)) of \$80.00 per vehicle.

- Increase the boat launch ISRP fee at the Gila River Boat Put-In from \$3.00 to \$8.00 per person, per trip (up to 5 days) (16 U.S.C. 6802(h)).
- Upon developing the area, establish a new campsite RUP fee of \$15.00 per night and \$5.00 per additional vehicle beyond two (expanded amenity fees, 16 U.S.C. 6802(g)(2)(A)), at the Indian Bread Rocks Recreation Area (IBRRA).

The proposed fee modifications are necessary to meet the growing expenses of maintaining the special areas and campground program, especially deferred maintenance costs stemming from the expanding popularity of the sites as travel destinations, the associated increase in public use, upcoming upgrades and their ongoing operating and maintenance costs, and the increasing age of some facilities.

2 Background and Authorities

This draft business plan has been prepared to meet the criteria defined in the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act of 2004 (Public Law 108-447; Title VIII, Section 801; 16 U.S.C. 6801–6814). The authorities and regulations for this draft business plan are:

- **The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 (Public Law 94-579; 43 U.S.C. 1701–1787)**, contains BLM’s general land use management authority over the public lands, and establishes outdoor recreation as one of the principal uses of those lands. Section 302 (b) of FLPMA directs the Secretary of the Interior to regulate through permits or other instruments the use of the public lands. Section 303 of FLPMA contains BLM’s authority to enforce the regulations and impose penalties.
- **The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) of 2004** repealed applicable portions of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act and replaced BLM’s authority to collect recreation fees. This current law authorizes BLM to collect recreation fees at sites that meet certain requirements, allows BLM to keep the fee revenues at the local offices where they were collected, and directs how BLM will manage and utilize these revenues. FLREA also established the America the Beautiful – The National Parks and Federal Recreational Pass Program. FLREA (16 U.S.C. 6802(b)(1)) does not grant the authority for BLM to provide discounts or reduced recreation fees for local residents or other groups.
- **Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 2930 (43 CFR 2930) Permits for Recreation on Public Lands** contains the regulations governing BLM’s recreation permitting program.

This draft business plan has also been prepared pursuant to all applicable BLM recreation fee program policies and guidance, including:

- BLM Manual 2930, *Recreation Permits and Fees*, Rel. 2-296 dated October 22, 2007

- BLM Handbook 2930-1, *Recreation Permit and Fee Administration Handbook*, Rel. 2-300 dated November 17, 2014

The BLM strives to manage recreation and visitor services to serve diverse visitor outdoor recreation demands while maintaining sustainable conditions to conserve the public lands. This helps ensure visitors' desired recreation choices remain available. The BLM's goals for delivering recreation benefits from BLM-administered lands and waters to the American people and their communities are to:

- Improve access to appropriate recreation opportunities,
- Ensure a quality experience and enjoyment of natural and cultural resources and provide for and receive fair value in recreation.

2.1 Establishment of Special Areas and Requirement for Individual Special Recreation Permits

Under 43 CFR 2931.2, BLM may establish a Special Recreation Permit (SRP) and fee system for the use of special areas. SRPs for individual recreation use in a special area are referred to as "Individual Special Recreation Permits" (BLM H-2930-1, Chapt.1, I.D.). ISRP fee rates are set by the BLM State Director based on several considerations in order to ensure a fair return for the use of public lands. These considerations include: management costs related to the special area, costs of operating the permit system, and comparison with fees charged in similar areas. Fees charged in a special area apply to all users of the area, including: private, non-commercial visitors; clients and guests of commercial permittees; and participants and spectators in a competitive event (BLM H-2930-1, Chapt.1, III.G.2.e.).

Given increased visitation and the need to preserve recreation resources at the HWDRA, the SFO developed an associated action to the draft business plan, analyzed in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and all other applicable statutes, to establish it as a "special area" and instituted the requirement for a fee-based individual permit system. BLM regulations and policy define a "special area" as: any area where the authorized officer determines that resources need to be protected by special management and control measures and that a permit system for individual use (i.e., private, non-commercial) would achieve management objectives (43 CFR 2932.5; BLM H-2930-1, Chapt.1, I.D.). In August 2024, the decision was made to designate the Hot Well Dunes Recreation Area as a special area and require a permit system for individual use of the special area to better achieve special management objectives. Implementation of the permit system will be published in the Federal Register. (43 CFR 2932.13).

3 Introduction to the Safford Field Office Recreation Program

The BLM Safford Field Office (SFO) manages 1.4 million acres of deserts, mountains, and grasslands in six eastern Arizona counties (Apache, Cochise, Gila, Graham, Greenlee, and Navajo). The BLM Safford Field Office, located three hours southeast of Phoenix and two hours northeast of Tucson, is part of the BLM Gila District and falls inside the 2nd, 6th, and 7th congressional districts in Arizona.

The Safford Field Office's boundaries stretch from the Navajo Nation in the north to the international border with Mexico to the south. The SFO is responsible for

stewardship of eight units within BLM's National Landscape Conservation System. These include the Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area (Figure 1); six designated Wilderness areas, including the world-renowned Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness; and one wilderness study area. Public lands located within SFO also include 11 Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Muleshoe Ranch Cooperative Management Area, Black Hills Back Country Byway, Willcox Playa National Natural Landmark, Guadalupe Canyon Outstanding Natural Area, one property on the National Register of Historic Places, two designated rockhounding areas, and more than 30 miles of stream segments recommended as suitable for designation into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Fee sites in the field office include designated "special areas", developed campgrounds, and one off-highway vehicle (OHV) open area. Figure 2 shows locations of all fee sites and areas in the field office.

Most visitors come to experience the striking desert mountains, impressive riparian areas, and outstanding opportunities for unconfined recreation including hunting, off roading, hiking, fishing, backpacking, river floating, rockhounding, camping, wildlife viewing, and other dispersed uses.



Figure 1: Kayakers on a section of the Gila River in the Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area

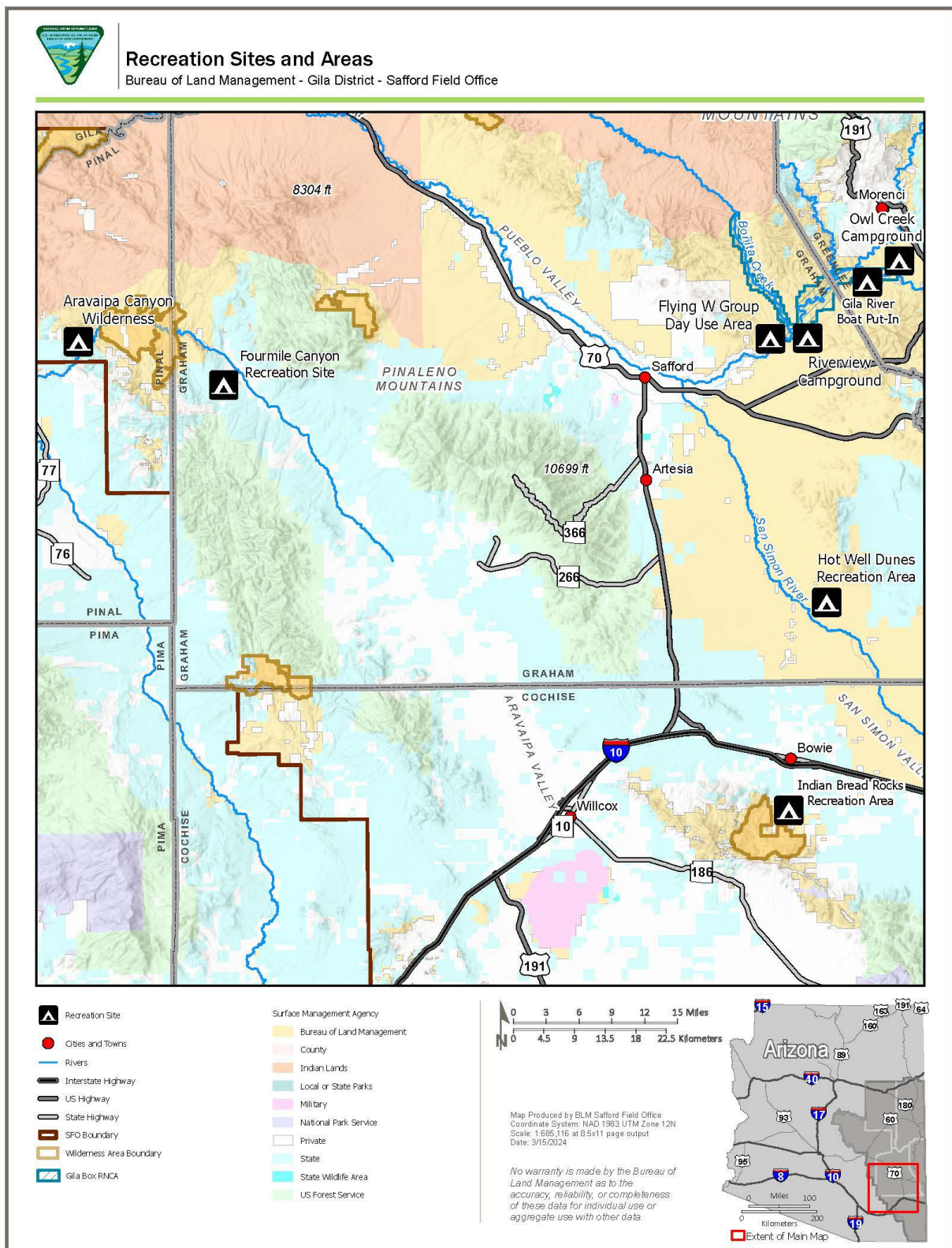


Figure 2: Safford Field Office and Gila Box RNCA Recreation Sites and Areas Map

Other major outdoor recreation providers in the area include the United States Forest Service (USFS), Arizona State Parks & Trails, San Carlos Apache Reservation, and National Park Service (NPS).

The Mount Graham Recreation Area, part of the USFS Coronado National Forest, provides both summer and winter recreation activities such as camping, hiking, fishing, snowshoeing, sledding, and snow play. Two Arizona State Parks, Roper Lake and Dankworth Pond, provide fishing and boating activities, with Roper Lake offering a more developed camping experience with cabin rentals and RV hook ups. The San Carlos Apache Reservation Recreation and Wildlife Office provides daily and yearly fishing permits, hunting tags and permits, recreation permits, and river/boating permits. The NPS Chiricahua National Monument, well known for its amazing rock formations, supplies a variety of attractions including hiking trails, campgrounds, interpretive programs, and a scenic drive.

3.1 Visitation

The nationally increasing visitation to outdoor recreation sites also holds true for the SFO, which has experienced a generally increasing rise in visitors over the last five years.

In Fiscal Years (FY) 2019 through 2023, the Safford Field Office experienced the following estimated visitation:

- FY 2019: 146,363 visits
- FY 2020: 164,480 visits
- FY 2021: 177,868 visits
- FY 2022: 193,871 visits
- FY 2023: 191,425 visits

The 5-year average was 174,807 visits from fiscal years 2019-2023. Table 2 shows visitation by site and area over the same period of time and demonstrates the difference in visitation between locations. While future use levels across the field office are anticipated to level off to pre Covid-19 pandemic numbers, a marginally increasing trend in visitation is still expected in the coming years.

Table 2: Estimated Number of Visitors by Site and Area to Safford Field Office, Fiscal Years 2019-2023

| Site/Area | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 5-Year Average |
|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|----------------|
| Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness | 4,499 | 5,349 | 5,761 | 5,904 | 5,283 | 5,359 |
| Fourmile Canyon Recreation Site | 595 | 515 | 720 | 2,639 | 2,644 | 1,423 |
| Hot Well Dunes Recreation Area | 9,133 | 7,059 | 17,337 | 17,146 | 19,082 | 13,951 |
| Gila River Boat Put-In | 273 | 213 | 6,154 | 5,212 | 7,491 | 3,869 |
| Owl Creek Campground | 523 | 700 | 1,054 | 741 | 1,417 | 887 |
| Riverview Campground | 899 | 947 | 1,133 | 1,441 | 1,372 | 1,158 |
| Indian Bread Rock Recreation Area | 17,120 | 17,634 | 28,541 | 26,109 | 23,923 | 22,665 |

3.2 Visitor Demographics and Trends

Some visitor demographic information on age and gender is available from three Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) visitor surveys conducted at the Gila Box RNCA in 2015 and at HWDRA and at Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness in 2019.

The 2015 survey results from the Gila Box RNCA contain visitor responses that apply to Owl Creek Campground, Riverview Campground, and the Gila River Boat Put-In. Adults made up the largest proportion of visitors with 71% in that age group. It was found that adults between 61-70 years old made up 33% of all adult respondents. The gender composition of respondents was 52% male and 48% female.

Visitor demographics at HWDRA show the largest visitor group that was surveyed was 75% adults ages 18 and over. Within the adult group, those in the 31-40 age range held the largest percentage of respondents at 30%, followed by 18% of visitors in the 61-70 age range. In contrast, this site had the highest proportion of children identified in visitor groups in all GPRA surveys. This recreation area demonstrated the widest gap in gender difference with 67% male and 33% female respondents during the survey period.

The 2019 GPRA survey for Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness yielded the largest proportion of visitors in the adult age group at 84%. The adult age range was widely distributed with 25% of respondents at the 41-50 age, 19% at both the 22-30 and 31-40 age ranges, and 17% at the 51-60 age range. The gender split of respondents was 54% male and 46% female. This survey also contained visitor location data showing that the two largest Arizona counties of origin for visitors were Maricopa and Pima, and that about 24% of respondents came from 14 states across the county.

Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness permit reservations include additional demographic information on visitor origin. In 2023, about 84.6% of Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness permits were issued to visitors from Arizona, while 14.7% were issued to visitors from other U.S. states and 0.7% to international visitors. Similar trends in visitor origin were also demonstrated in the previous few years.

Additional general visitor demographics for the area were obtained from the Arizona Office of Tourism, 2022 Travel USA Visitor Profile for the Tucson and Southern Region. This report contains data for Cochise, Graham, and Greenlee counties.

The total number of overnight trips to the Tucson and Southern Arizona Region was 5.8 million, an 18% increase from the previous year with visitors spending an average of 5.4 nights in the region. Overnight trip characteristics showed that the main purpose of trips for 44% of respondents was to visit family or friends while the main purpose of trips for 7% was to visit the outdoors. However, during trips, outdoor activities made up 48% of planned activities with sightseeing, hiking or backpacking, national and state parks, and swimming among the top ten activities and experiences overall.

The average household income of overnight visitors was \$68,000, with 46% of overnight visitors earning up to \$49,900 a year. The average age of visitors was 48.9 years with 81% having an educational attainment of some college or higher. The employment breakdown showed 43% as retired, 46% as full-time or self-employed, and 10% as part-time. The racial makeup of those surveyed was 81% White, 15% Other, and 9% African American, with 17% of respondents identifying as Hispanic.

For the northern lands in the field office, regional visitation data from the Arizona Office of Tourism was also available for Apache and Navajo counties in 2021. These reports were more limited in scope but still provide valuable insights into visitation.

Navajo County received the most visits around Memorial Day, Labor Day, and Presidents' Day weekends. Most visitors were from Phoenix (32%), followed by 12.8% from Albuquerque/Santa Fe, while the rest were from other major U.S. cities. Visitors from both Phoenix and Albuquerque/Santa Fe spent an average of approximately two days in Navajo County.

Apache County received the most visits during the 4th of July, Labor Day, and Memorial Day weekends. Indigenous People's Day received the same amount of visitation as Labor Day weekend. Most visitors were from Phoenix (25.9%), followed by 12.4% from Los Angeles, while the rest were from other major U.S. cities. Visitors from both Phoenix and Los Angeles spent an average of just over one day in Apache County.

3.3 Recreation Fee Program

Table 3 lists the applicable Resource Management Plan (RMP) and site-specific plans guiding the SFO recreation fee program.

Table 3: Existing/Proposed Fee Sites and Areas and Applicable Land Use Plans

| Existing or Proposed Fee Site/Area | Site-Specific Plans | Activity Level |
|--|--|--|
| Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness | Safford District Resource Management Plan (1992) | Aravaipa Ecosystem Management Plan (2015) |
| Flying W Group Day Use Area (No Fee Change) | Safford District Resource Management Plan (1992) | Gila Box Management Plan (1998) |
| Fourmile Canyon Recreation Site | Safford District Resource Management Plan (1992) | Aravaipa Ecosystem Management Plan (2015) |
| Hot Well Dunes Recreation Area | Safford District Resource Management Plan (1992) | Hot Well Dunes Recreation Area Project Plan (1991) |
| Gila River Boat Put-In | Safford District Resource Management Plan (1992) | Gila Box Management Plan (1998) |
| Owl Creek Campground | Safford District Resource Management Plan (1992) | Gila Box Management Plan (1998) |
| Riverview Campground | Safford District Resource Management Plan (1992) | Gila Box Management Plan (1998) |
| Indian Break Rocks Recreation Area (Proposed) | Safford District Resource Management Plan (1992) | Plan Forthcoming |

Tables 4 and 5 include the size and type of recreation fee sites/areas encompassed by the draft business plan and the current or proposed fees, along with the specific project account for those fees. Fees at all but one site (Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness) are currently collected using fee envelopes, counted by hand, and driven to the bank for depositing. Not included in the draft business plan is the Flying W Group Picnic Site, the Black Hills and Round Mountain Rockhound Areas, and just over a dozen overlook and picnic sites at the Gila Box RNCA and Black Hills Backcountry Byway. Outside of the following sites, over 99.6% of the field office remains open to dispersed recreation at no cost.

The SFO recreation program is aided by volunteer assistance from seasonal campground hosts that provide visitor protection, assist with fee compliance, perform maintenance duties, and give general information to visitors of fee sites. Many of the volunteers have over a decade of experience in the field office and are invaluable in the administration of the recreation program during the high use seasons. Some have even received national awards and recognition for their contributions to the recreation program. Although no partnerships or friends' groups currently exist at our recreation sites, partnerships and agreements will be pursued when the opportunities arise.

Table 4: Recreation Fee Site or Area Description of Existing Fees and Type

| Existing Fee Site/Area | Size (acres) | Current Fee(s) | Existing Type of Recreation Fee Site/Area and Permit | Recreation Project Account |
|--|--------------|---|--|----------------------------|
| Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness | 2,868 | \$5 per person/day or overnight | Special Area Individual Special Recreation Permit | LVRDAZ040000 |
| Fourmile Canyon Recreation Site | 10 | \$5.00 per site/per night (includes two vehicles) \$2.00 for additional vehicles (as space allows) | Campground Expanded Amenity Fee | LVRDAZ190000 |
| Hot Well Dunes Recreation Area | 2,213 | \$3.00 per vehicle/per day (day or overnight use) \$30.00 per vehicle annual pass (day or overnight use) | Campground and OHV Area Standard Amenity Fee | LVRDAZ020000 |
| Gila River Boat Put-In | 2 | \$3.00 per person/per trip Fee covers a trip length of 5 days | Special Area Individual Special Recreation Permit | LVRDAZ180000 |
| Owl Creek Campground | 5 | \$5.00 per site/per night (includes two vehicles) \$2.00 for additional vehicles (as space allows) | Campground Expanded Amenity Fee | LVRDAZ050000 |
| Riverview Campground | 20 | \$5.00 per site/per night (includes two vehicles) \$2.00 for additional vehicles (as space allows) | Campground Expanded Amenity Fee | LVRDAZ050000 |

Table 5: Recreation Fee Area Description of Proposed Fee and Type

| Proposed Fee Area | Size (acres) | Proposed Fee(s) | Proposed Type of Recreation Fee Area and Permit | Recreation Project Account |
|--|--------------|--|---|----------------------------|
| Indian Bread Rocks Recreation Area (Proposed) | 20 | \$15.00 per site/per night (includes two vehicles) \$5.00 for additional vehicles (as space allows) | Campground Expanded Amenity Fee | LVRDAZ__0000 |

4 Description of Each Existing or Proposed Fee Site/Area

4.1 Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness Area

Description: The 19,410-acre Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness Area (Figure 3) is part of the greater Aravaipa Canyon Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) that the BLM has determined requires focused or intensive management. The SRMA also contains many acres of dispersed areas around the wilderness area popular to backpackers and hunters. Within the canyon, the perennial Aravaipa Creek is home to various reptiles, mammals, and insects, and over 200 species of birds which live among the cottonwoods, sycamores, willows, ash, and other riparian vegetation. Prior to the wilderness designation, a 2,867-acre area inside Aravaipa Canyon was established as a designated Special Area through a planning effort with public involvement in 1979 to protect this fragile ecosystem and institute a permit system and quota. The purpose of the permit system is to sustain the natural character of the area and provide opportunities for outstanding recreation where it is subject to the highest visitation. By controlling the amount of use within the confined canyon walls, it can continue to be managed as the most popular portion of the Wilderness. Figure 5 shows a map of the Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness.



Figure 3: Pair of backpackers traveling through Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness.

Activities: Day hiking, horseback-riding, backpacking, hunting, and wildlife viewing.

Location: Approximately 50 miles west of Safford between Dudleyville and Klondyke, Arizona. Elevation in the wilderness ranges from approximately 2,600 to 4,900 feet.

Permit Type: Individual Special Recreation Permit (16 U.S.C. 6802(h))

Current Amenities and Services at Administrative Sites and Trailheads:

- **Brandenburg Ranger and Contact Station:** public contact station, overflow parking, a vault toilet, an undeveloped camping spot, interpretive signs, maps, and brochures as well as refuse containers.
- **Klondyke Ranger Station:** interpretive signs, maps and brochures.
- **West Trailhead:** vault toilet, parking area, interpretive signs and kiosk as well as refuse containers.
- **East Trailhead:** vault toilet, parking area, interpretive signs, and refuse containers.

Visitation: Because the main activities at this location are hiking and backpacking, weather and water conditions play a large part in the visitor experience and, consequently, the visitation. During the 2023 calendar year, the site received the highest number of visitors during the spring

and fall months. However, with the availability of water year-round in Aravaipa Creek, visitors brave the summer temperatures well into June before a decline in visitation numbers is observed. Threats of flash floods also deter visitors in the late summer months. Lower visitation in January and February is attributed to cold air and water temperatures. This general visitation pattern holds true most years as illustrated in Figure 4.

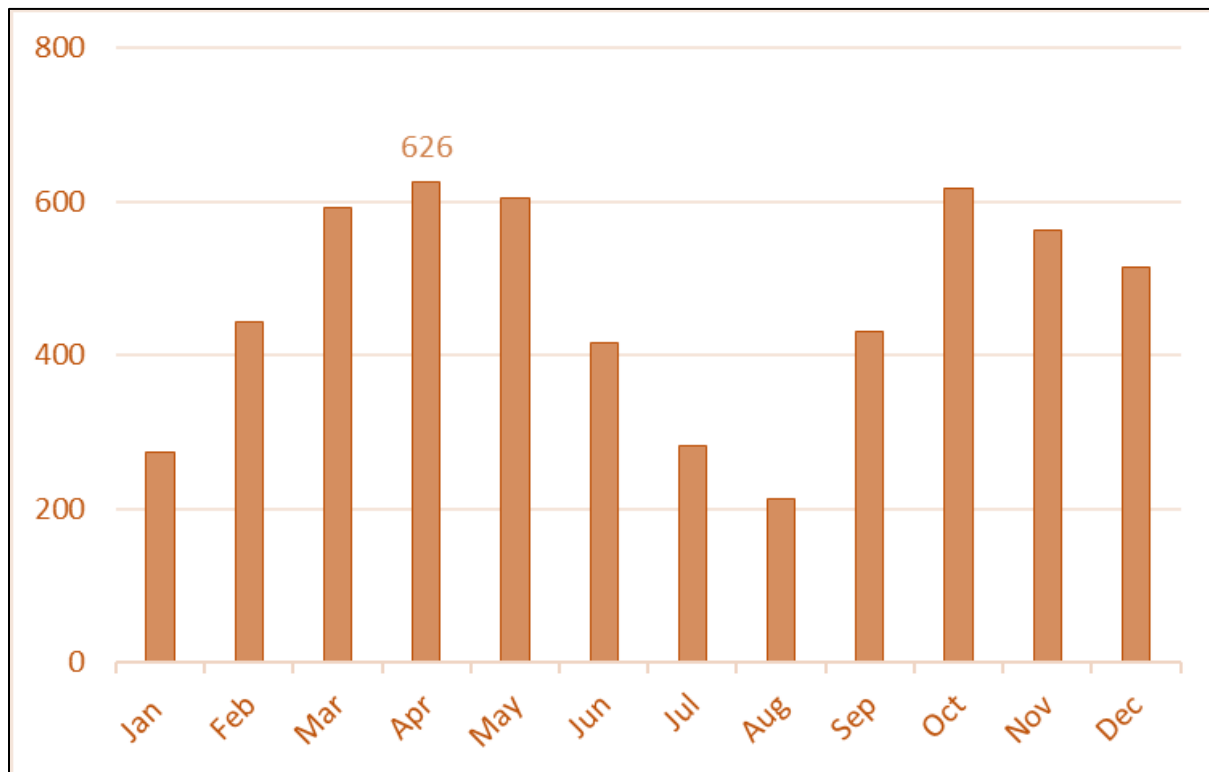


Figure 4: Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness Average Monthly Visitors from 2019-2023

Fee: Individuals (and groups of up to 10) must obtain ISRPs (16 U.S.C. 6802(h)) to hike all lands within the Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness permit area. The existing fee system was implemented in April 1984 with a fee of \$1.50 per visitor (at that time, the fees were established under authority of the Land and Water Conservation Act (LWCFA), as amended, [Public Law 33-578]). In 1999, fees were raised to the current fee of \$5.00 per visitor per day or night. Permits are distributed on a “first-come, first-served” basis and can be obtained 3 months in advance via Recreation.gov. Canyon use is limited to 50 people per day, 30 from the west end, and 20 from the east end.

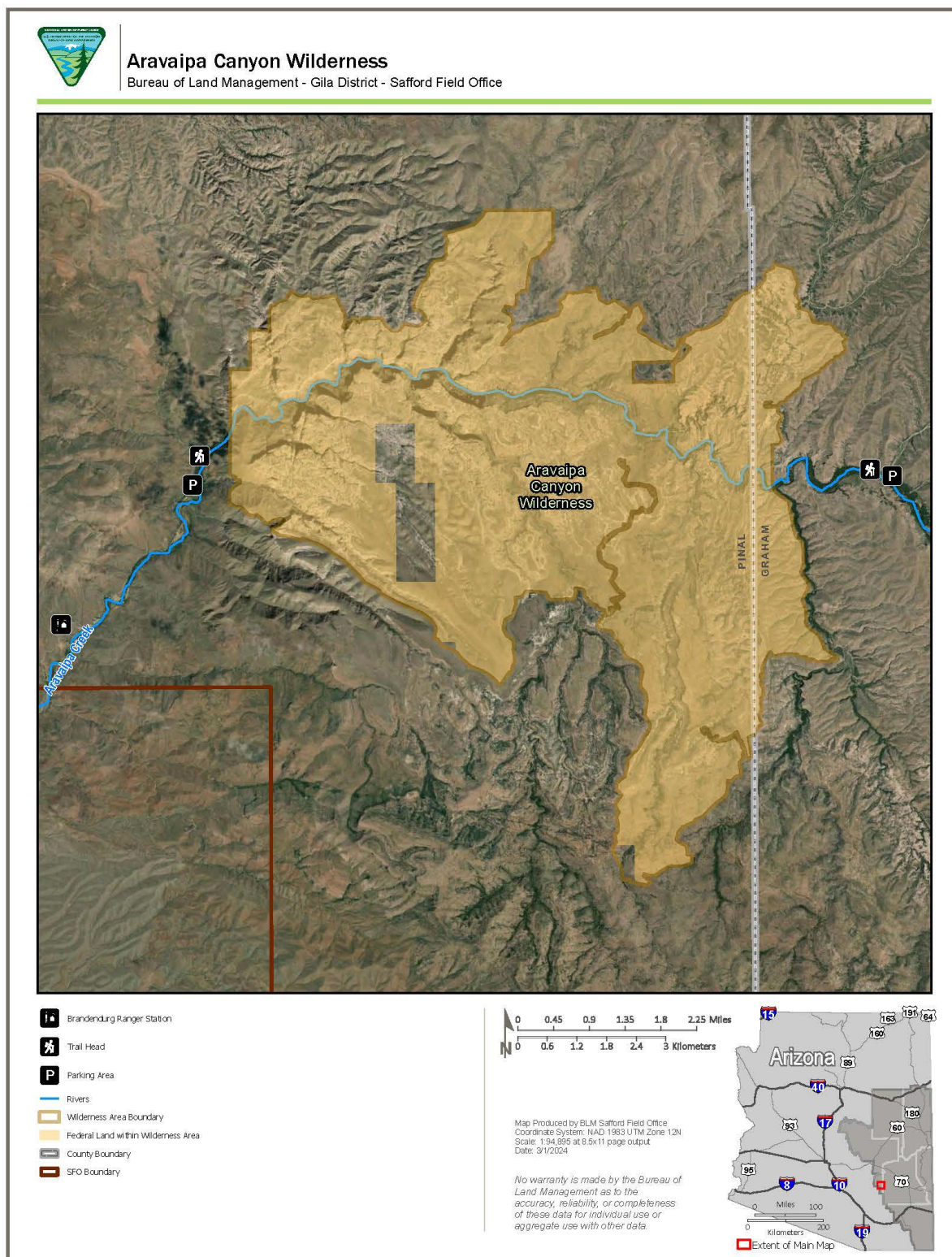


Figure 5: Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness Map

4.2 Fourmile Canyon Recreation Site

Description: Located among large mesquite trees and desert grasses, the campground offers a developed setting for an overnight or extended camping trip. In the spring and fall, the campground is popular with javelina and deer hunters. Fourmile Canyon Campground (Figure 6) is within the Aravaipa Canyon Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) which includes about 75,000 acres of public lands at the northern end of the Galiuro Mountains in southeastern Arizona. The immediate surrounding area is largely comprised of private land, making this campground all the more popular. A BLM ranger station is located less than one mile away in Klondyke, Arizona and serves as an important visitor contact point. Since 2001, the site has been staffed on a part-time basis by site host volunteers who assist visitors, monitor fee compliance, and provide maintenance as needed at the campground. Figure 8 shows a map of the recreation area.



Figure 6: Typical campsite at Fourmile Canyon Recreation Site

Activities: Camping, hunting, hiking, backpacking, wildlife viewing, off-roading exploration, and viewing a nearby prehistoric interpretive site.

Location: Fourmile Canyon Campground is located 47 miles west of Safford near Klondyke, Arizona at an elevation of 3,500 feet.

Permit Type: 10 Expanded Amenity individual campsites (16 U.S.C. 6802(g)(2)(A)).

Current Expanded Amenities and Services:

- Tent or trailer spaces: Yes
- Picnic tables: Yes
- Drinking water: Yes (The well is damaged and needs replacing)
- Access roads: Yes
- Fee collection: Yes
- Visitor protection: Yes
- Refuse containers: Yes
- Toilet facilities: Yes
- Campfire pit/ring: Yes

Visitation: In addition to annual visitation data, information from TRAFx vehicle counters provide insight into campground use patterns throughout the year (Figure 7). The main user groups of this site are hunters and hikers/backpackers. Counter data confirms visitation spikes in October and January, which corresponds with the start of popular hunting seasons. Many local residents use the campground as a base camp during javelina and big horn sheep hunts in the area. Monthly traffic is higher from February to April, which is likely due to individuals recreating in Aravaipa Canyon and the surrounding area. Those months are the most competitive to obtain canyon permits due to pleasant weather and hiking conditions.

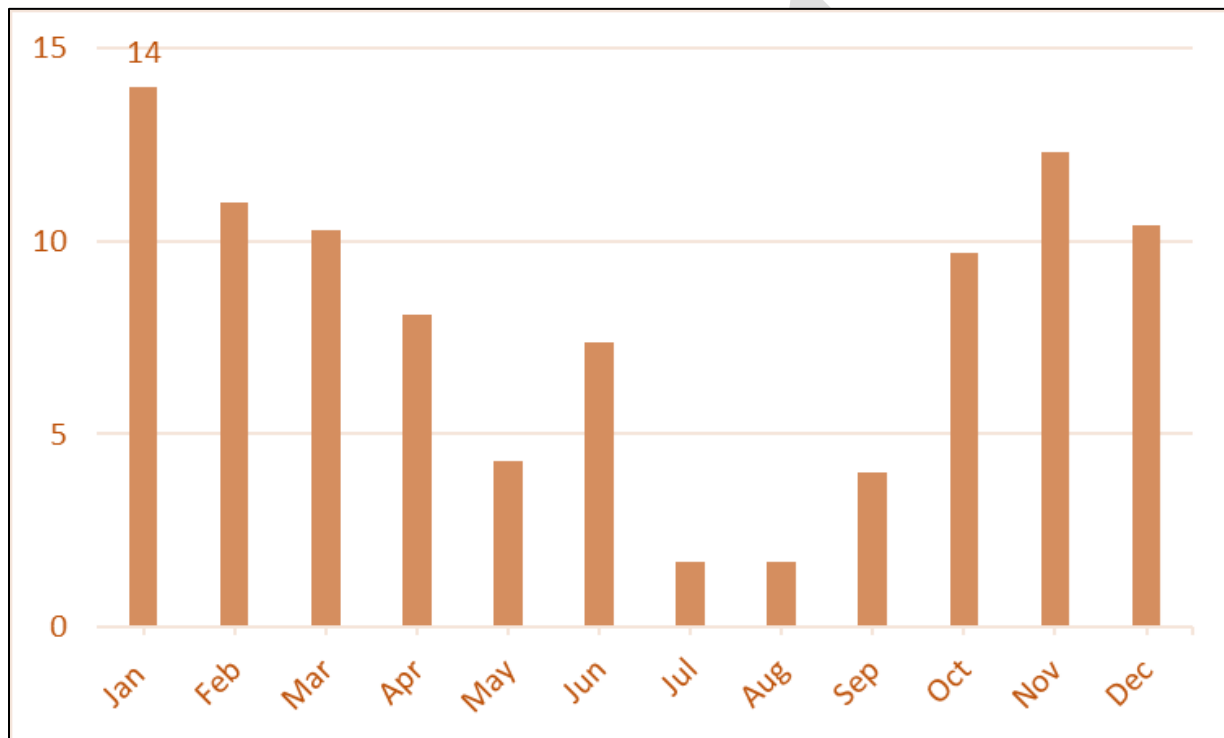


Figure 7: Fourmile Canyon Recreation Site Monthly Traffic Totals for 2023

Fees: A fee of \$4 per day was established in April 1996 under the authority of the LWCFA. A fee increase of \$1 per day was implemented sometime between 1996 and 2004. After the FLREA was enacted in 2004, a business plan for the site was developed in 2005 maintaining the expanded amenity fee of \$5.00 per night per campsite and \$2.00 per additional vehicle beyond two as space allows at each site.

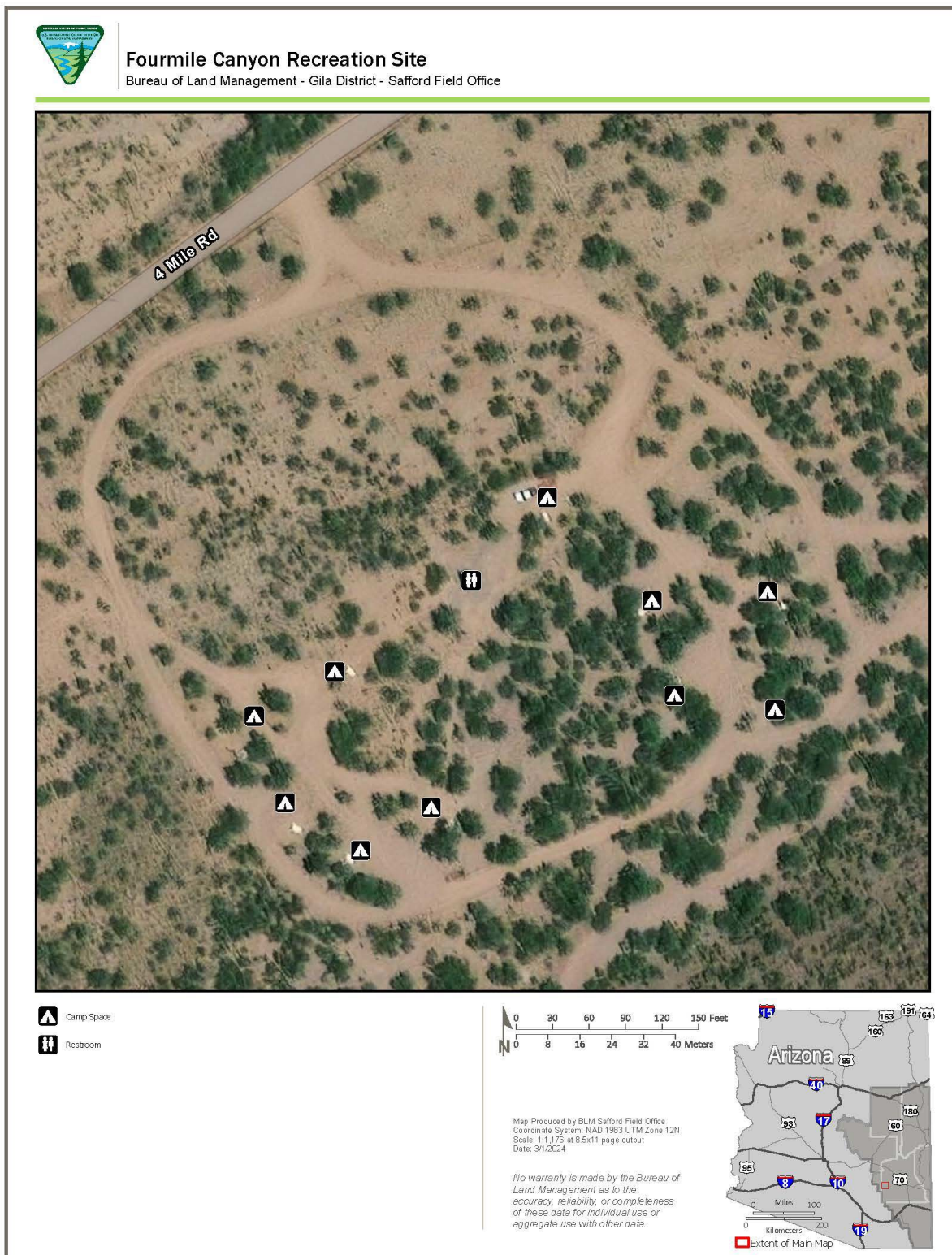


Figure 8: Fourmile Canyon Recreation Site Map

4.3 Hot Well Dunes Recreation Area (HWDRA)

Description: The BLM acquired the area encompassing the HWDRA in 1985 through a land exchange with the State of Arizona. An artesian well serves as the focal point of recreation activities within the area. The well is a result of an oil drilling operation in 1928 that hit water instead of oil. The water is piped to two hot tubs providing hot water soaking and recreational opportunities for visitors of all ages. The other features of this site are a wildlife viewing area, campground, and a 2,200-acre sand dune complex providing great adventures for off-highway vehicle enthusiasts, an opportunity that is hard to find elsewhere in the state (Figure 9). Figure 11 shows a map of the recreation area.



Figure 9: RVs, trailers, and OHV haulers parked at Hot Well Dunes Recreation Area

Activities: Off-roading activities, hot tub soaking, camping, picnicking, wildlife viewing, rockhounding, and hiking.

Location: Approximately 35 miles southeast of Safford, Arizona and 20 miles north of Bowie, Arizona in the San Simon Valley. The elevation of the site is 3,450 feet.

Permit Type: Proposed modification from a Standard Amenity Fee (16 U.S.C. 6802 (f)(4)) to an Individual Special Recreation Permit (16 U.S.C. 6802(h)). Site specific annual pass (16 U.S.C. 6804(c)). (See Section 2. Background and Authorities, Establishment of Special Areas for more information.)

Current Amenities and Services:

- Tent or trailer spaces: Yes
- Picnic tables: Yes
- Drinking water: No
- Access roads: Yes
- Fee collection: Yes
- Visitor protection: Yes
- Refuse containers: Yes
- Toilet facilities: Yes

- Campfire pit/ring: Yes

Visitation: Vehicle counter data shows peak use during Thanksgiving and Easter weeks, with the total vehicle traffic in 2023 exceeding each of the last three years (Figure 10). As shown in the table below, the five months in 2023 with the highest vehicle counts from greatest to least were February, November, March, January, and April.

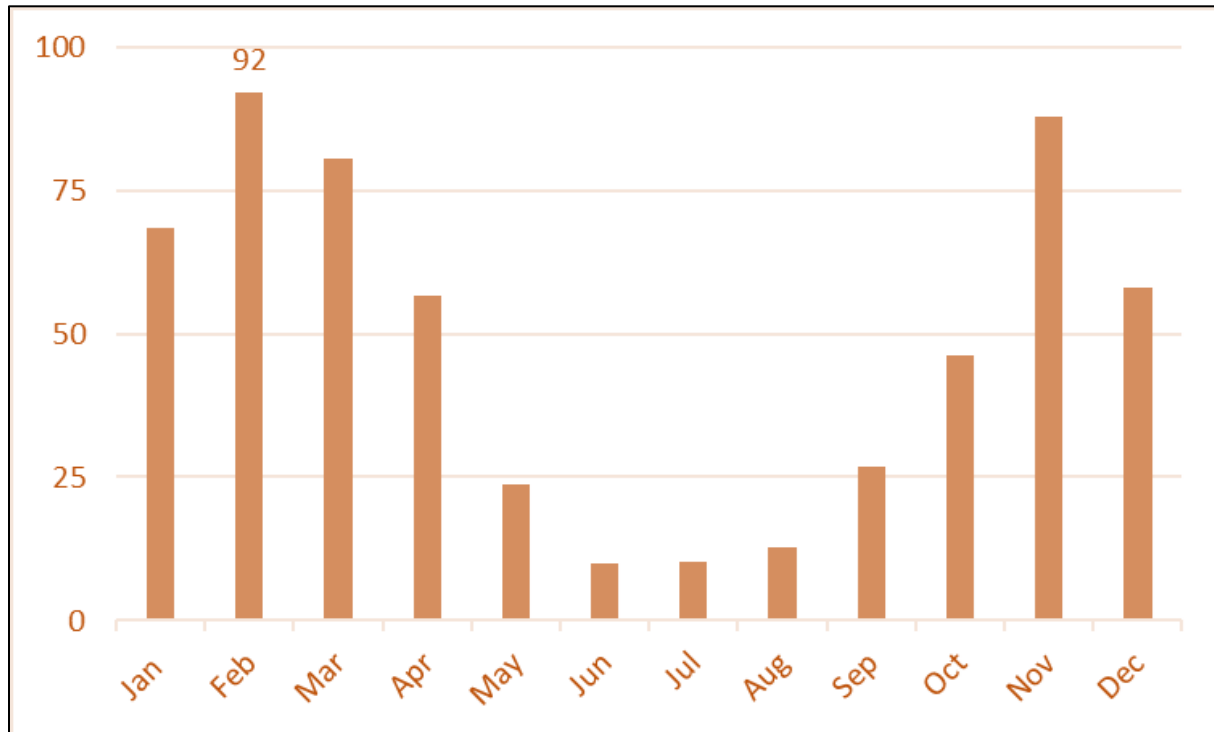


Figure 10: Hot Well Dunes Recreation Area Monthly Traffic Totals for 2023

Fees: The first business plan for the site was approved in January 1997 when the standard amenity fee was set at \$3.00 per vehicle per day, with an option for an annual pass of \$30.00 per vehicle. Another business plan was prepared pursuant to enactment of the FLREA in 2005, where the fees remained unchanged.

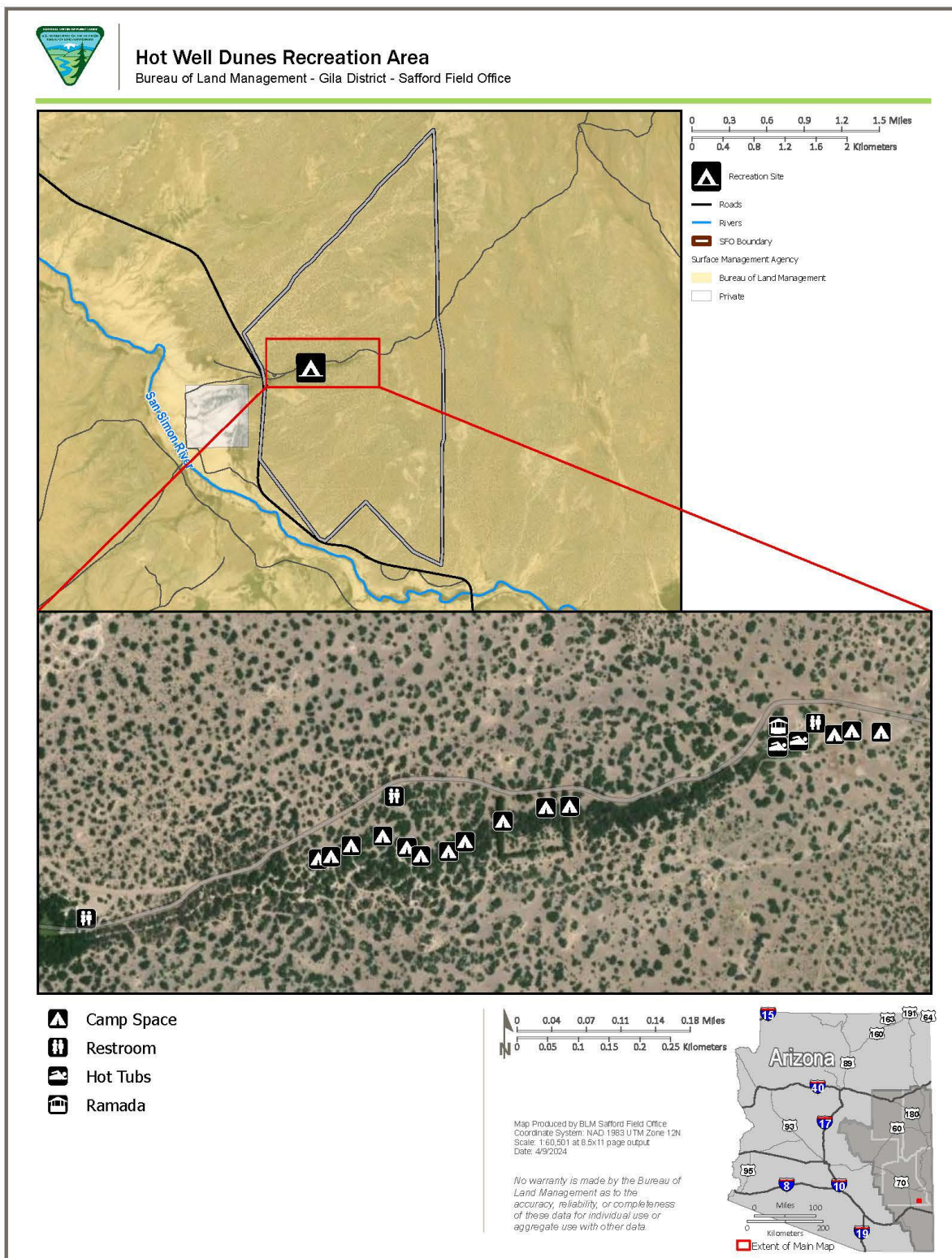


Figure 11: Hot Well Dunes Recreation Area Map

4.4 Gila River Boat Put-In

Description: The Gila River Boat Put-In provides access to the Gila River in the Gila Box RNCA, which was congressionally designated in 1990 making it a type of special area (Figure 12). Favorable snowpack and rain from the greater Gila River Watershed and infusions from the San Francisco River and Bonita Creek create a unique opportunity for floating, water play, and fishing along the river. The field office also authorizes a limited number of special recreation permits for commercial river guides through the Gila Box RNCA. Groups typically plan for multi-day trips and disperse camp along the riverbank. Visitors end their float trips at the Dry Canyon Boat Take Out, which is 23 miles downstream and the last opportunity to exit the river. Figure 14 shows a map of the recreation area.



Figure 12: Gila River Boat Put-In Sign

Activities: Kayaking, rafting, canoeing, pack rafting, tubing, swimming, fishing, picnicking, wildlife viewing, and hiking.

Location: Approximately 43 miles northeast of Safford, Arizona and 11.5 miles south of Morenci, Arizona. The site is accessible from the BLM Black Hills Backcountry Byway and sits at 3,300 feet in elevation.

Permit Type: Individual Special Recreation Permit (16 U.S.C. 6802(h)).

Current Amenities and Services:

- Tent or trailer spaces: No
- Picnic tables: Yes
- Drinking water: No
- Access roads: Yes
- Fee collection: Yes
- Visitor protection: No
- Refuse containers: Yes
- Toilet facilities: Yes
- Campfire pit/ring: No

Visitation: Vehicle counter data for 2023 shows the highest visitation in the spring and summer months (Figure 13). Traffic at the site varies greatly from year to year due to irregularity in water flows. Visitation tends to increase following years with heavy monsoons and winter snow and decreases in years with prolonged drought conditions and scant precipitation. In an optimal year, the highest traffic is from March to July.

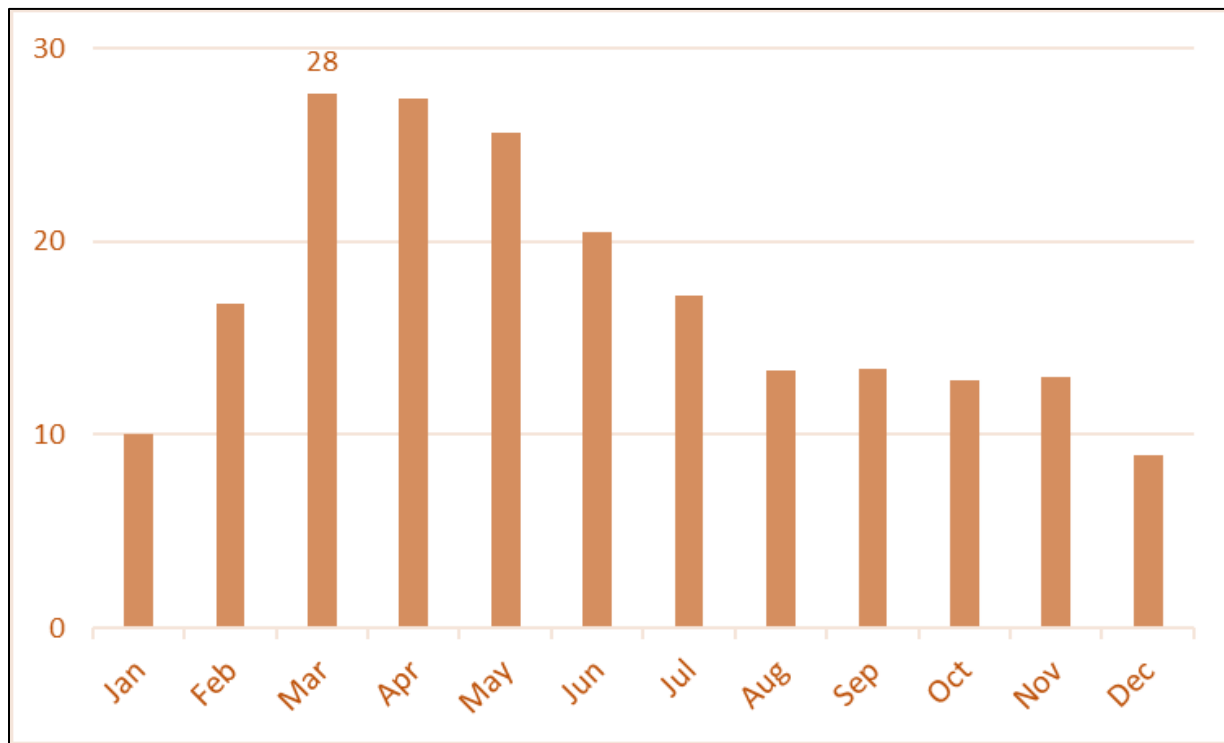


Figure 13: Gila River Boat Put-In Monthly Traffic Totals for 2023

Fees: In 1998, the GBRNCA was chosen to participate in the recreation fee demonstration project, which was authorized under a 1996 appropriations bill. The SFO began collecting fees on May 1, 1999. The Gila River Boater User Fee was implemented at the site – which was then called the Old Safford Bridge Picnic Area. Fees were \$3.00 per person, per trip with a maximum trip length of five days. That fee rate has not changed since 1999. Following the end of the recreation fee demonstration program and with updated guidance from the FLREA, the fee type was changed in 2005 from a recreation use permit to an individual, non-commercial special recreation permit with no change in rate.

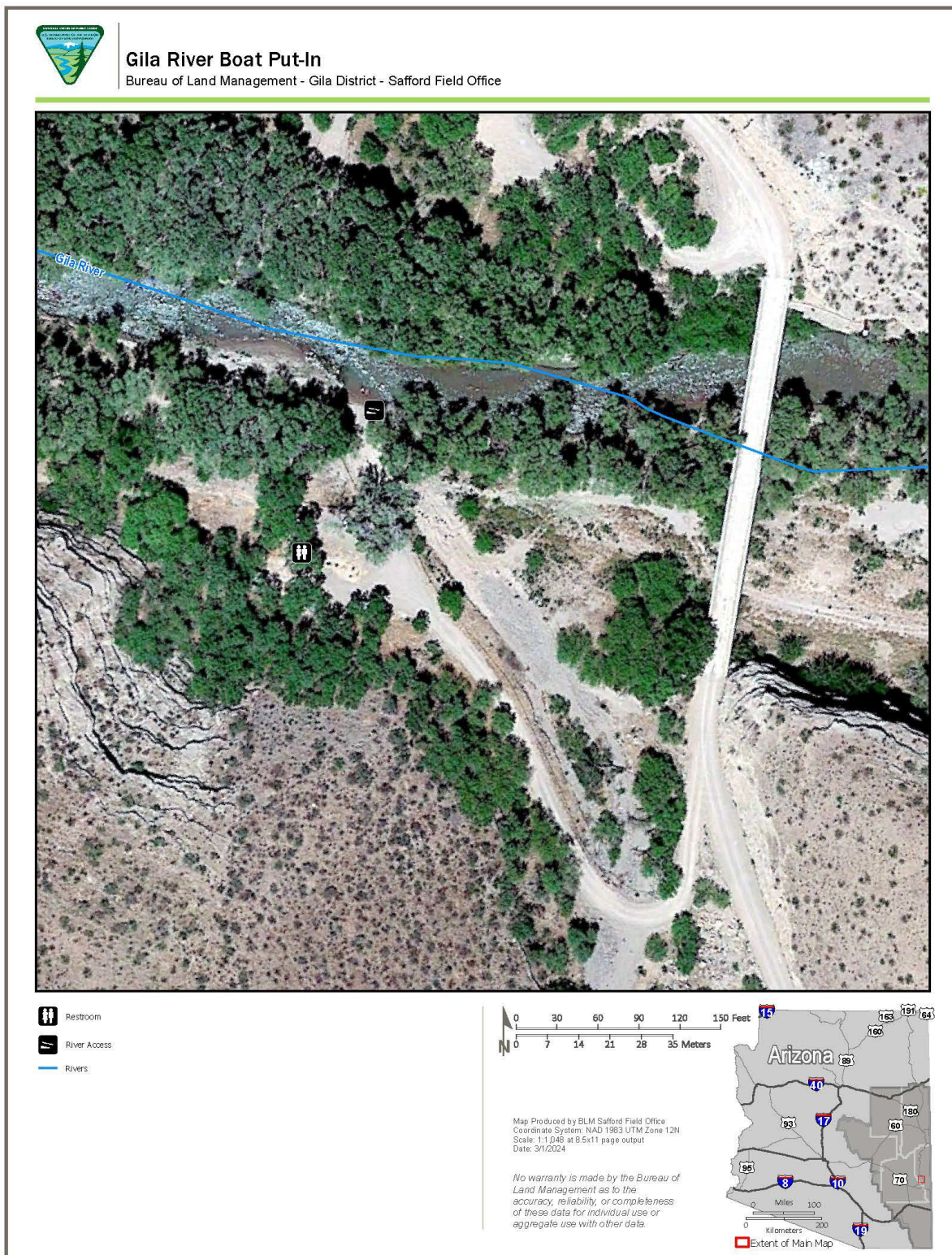


Figure 14: Gila River Boat Put-in Site Map

4.5 Owl Creek Campground

Description: Owl Creek Campground is located within the Gila Box RNCA and was established in the mid-1990s as a developed campground (Figure 15). It is seated on a north bench above the Gila River just a quarter mile from the Gila River Boat Put-In. The site is accessible from the BLM Black Hills Backcountry Byway and provides visitors with a beautiful view of the riparian area and Guthrie Peak, one of the highest points in Greenlee County. Figure 17 shows a map of the recreation area.



Figure 15: Picnic Table with Shade Structure at Typical Owl Creek Campground Campsite

Activities: Camping, hiking, wildlife viewing, scenic driving, and off roading.

Location: Approximately 43 miles northeast of Safford, Arizona and 11 miles south of Morenci, Arizona at an elevation of 3,400 feet.

Permit Type: 7 Expanded Amenity Campsites (16 U.S.C. 6802(g)(2)(A)).

Current Expanded Amenities and Services:

- Tent or trailer spaces: Yes
- Picnic tables: Yes
- Drinking water: Yes
- Access roads: Yes
- Fee collection: Yes
- Visitor protection: Yes
- Refuse containers: Yes
- Toilet facilities: Yes
- Campfire pit/ring: Yes

Visitation: No vehicle counter information is available for this site. Based off of annual ISRP permit sales, visitation trends follow similar patterns as other sites in the Gila Box RNCA (Figure 16). Most permits are sold during the spring and fall months with a steep decline in the summer months. On average, the months with the highest visitation are March, December and October while August, June, and July have the lowest visitation.

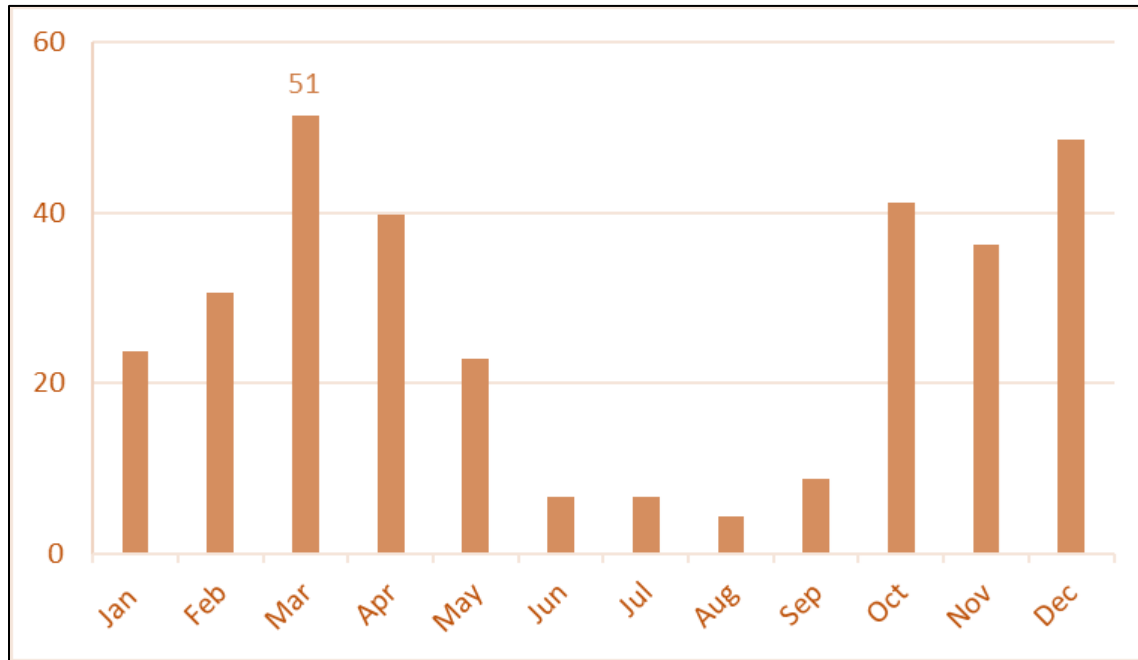


Figure 16: Owl Creek Campground Average Monthly Permits from 2019-2023

Fees: In 1998, the GBRNCA was chosen to participate in the recreation fee demonstration project, which was authorized under a 1996 appropriations bill. The SFO began collecting a fee of \$5.00 per night, per campsite, and \$2.00 per additional vehicle beyond two as space allows at each site, on May 1, 1999. Following the end of the fee demonstration program and with new guidance from the FLREA, an updated business plan was produced in 2005 with no change to the fee.

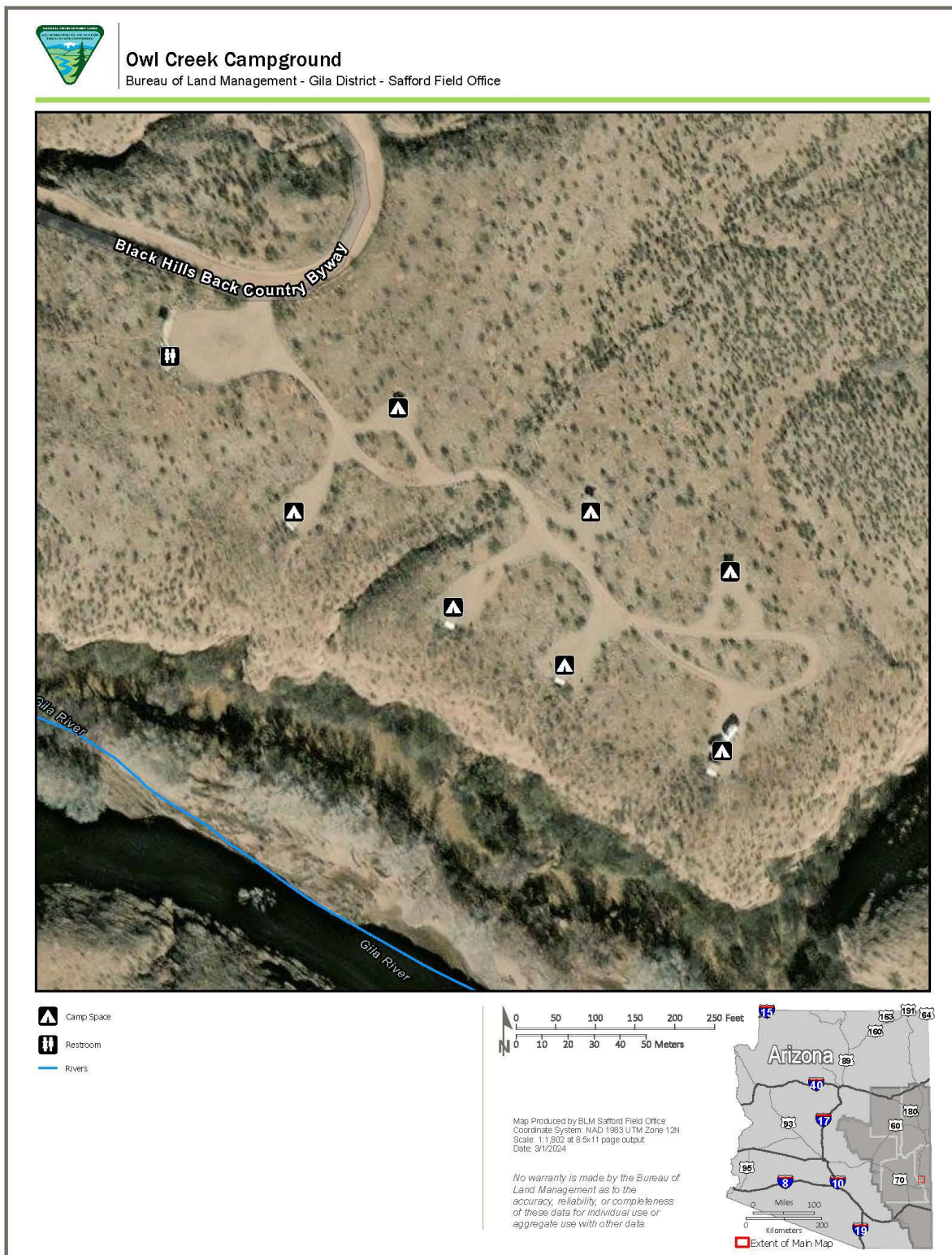


Figure 17: Owl Creek Campground Site Map

4.6 Riverview Campground

Description: This campground is the largest of the expanded amenity sites in the Gila Box RNCA and is a short drive from Safford, Arizona (Figure 18). It is situated on a northern bench overlooking the Gila River and is surrounded by various day use sites along the river. The area contains significant riparian areas with a plethora of birds, wildlife, and unique vegetation. Many recreators use this site as a base camp during hunting season or while floating the river. The site also provides administrative access to the municipal water infrastructure that supplies the majority of the Safford area and surrounding Gila Valley. Figure 20 shows a map of the recreation area.



Figure 18: Picnic Table and Shade Structure at a Typical Campsite in Riverview Campground

Activities: Camping, hiking, hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, off roading, social gatherings, and swimming.

Location: Approximately 18 miles east of Safford, Arizona and near the confluence of Bonita Creek and the Gila River. The area can be accessed from US 70 or Highway 191.

Permit Type: 13 Expanded Amenity campsites (16 U.S.C. 6802(g)(2)(A)).

Current Expanded Amenities and Services:

- Tent or trailer spaces: Yes
- Picnic tables: Yes
- Drinking water: Yes
- Access roads: Yes
- Fee collection: Yes
- Visitor protection: Yes
- Refuse containers: Yes
- Toilet facilities: Yes
- Campfire pit/ring: Yes

Visitation: No vehicle counter information is available for this site. Based off of ISRP permit sales, visitation trends follow similar patterns as other sites in the Gila Box RNCA (Figure 19). Most permits are sold during the spring and fall months with a steep decline in the summer months. Major holidays like Thanksgiving and Easter draw larger numbers to the campground.

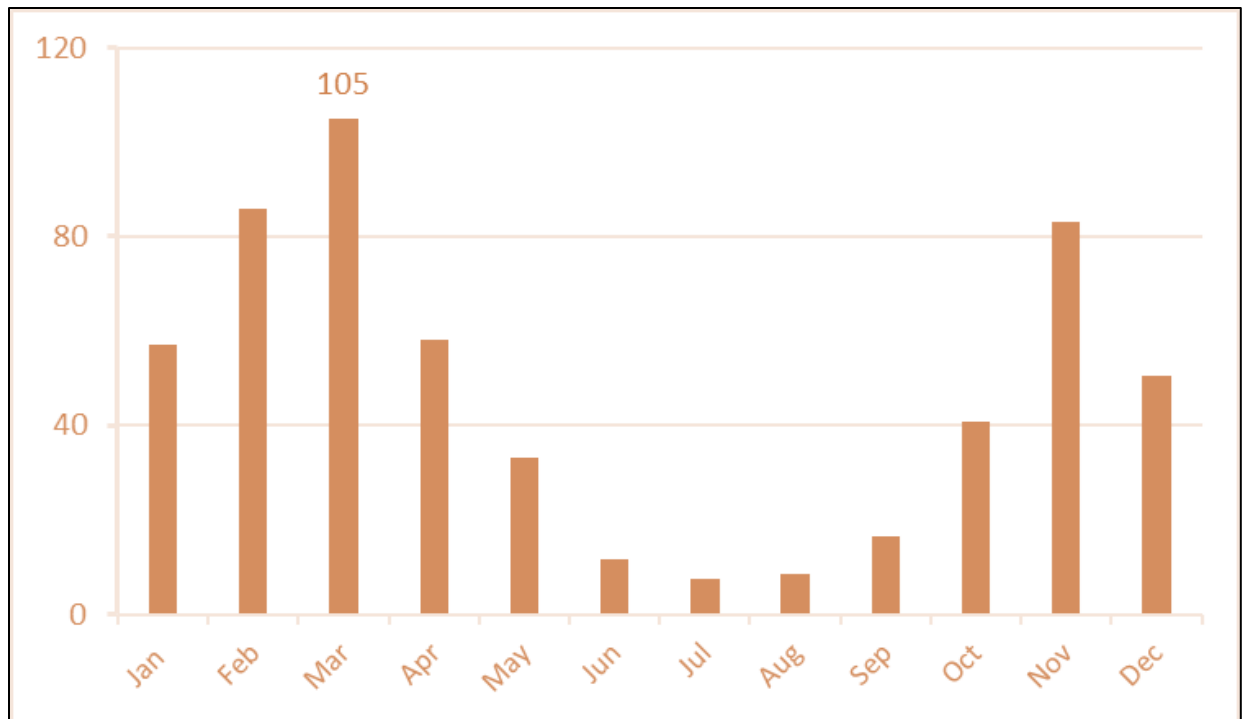


Figure 19: Riverview Campground Average Monthly Permits from 2019-2023

Fees: In 1998, the GBRNCA was chosen to participate in the recreation fee demonstration project, which was authorized under a 1996 appropriations bill. The SFO began collecting a fee of \$5.00 per night, per campsite, and \$2.00 per additional vehicle beyond two as space allows at each site, on May 1, 1999. Following the end of the fee demonstration program and with new guidance from the FLREA, an updated business plan was produced in 2005 with no change to the fee.

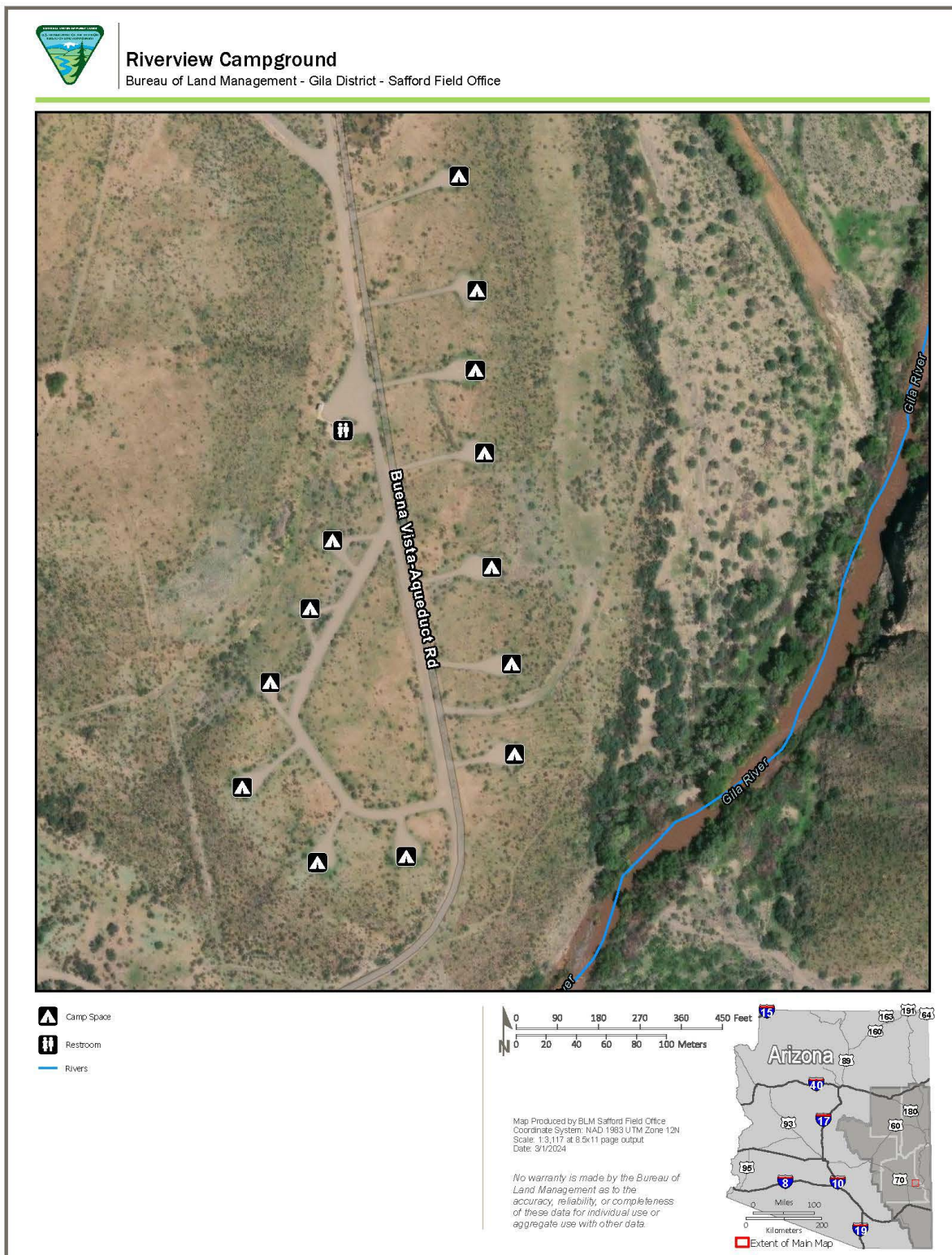


Figure 20: Riverview Campground Site Map

4.7 Indian Bread Rocks Recreation Area

Description: This site is the main access point to the Dos Cabezas Mountain Wilderness, which consists of 11,700 acres of rugged slopes ranging from 4,080 feet to 7,500 feet, allowing for a variety of plant and animal life, as well as excellent recreational opportunities. Visitors to the recreation area find a diverse terrain of granite outcropping and vegetated canyon floors (Figure 21). Explorers of the rock formations find evidence of indigenous inhabitants in the form of bedrock mortars and rock carvings. Due to its proximity to Interstate 10 (7 miles), the site has become a popular overnight camping location for vehicle and RV campers. In future planning efforts, the goal in developing the site would be to prevent encroachment into the neighboring wilderness area, avert conflict with livestock grazing, and provide services that protect the site's natural resources from waste and litter. Figure 23 shows a map of the recreation area.

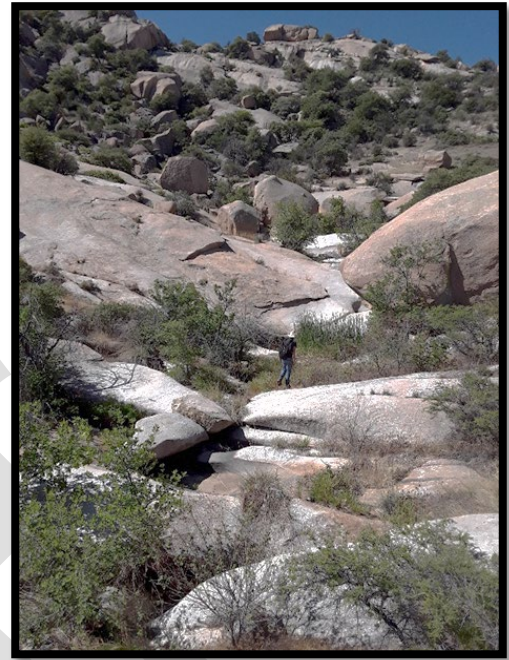


Figure 21: Person hiking on rocky landscape just outside the Indian Bread Rocks Recreation Area

Activities: Boondocking, camping, picnicking, hiking/backpacking, sightseeing, hunting, and photography.

Location: Approximately 20 miles east of Willcox, Arizona and 7 miles south of Bowie, Arizona in Cochise County at an elevation of about 4,300 feet.

Proposed Permit Type: Expanded Amenity Sites (16 U.S.C. 6802(g)(2)(A)). Planned site improvements would meet the expanded amenity requirements of FLREA before fee would be enacted. *(See Section 5. Proposed Modifications to Recreation Fee Rates for more information.)*

Current Amenities and Services:

- Tent or trailer spaces: No
- Picnic tables: No
- Access roads: Yes
- Fee collection: No
- Visitor protection: Yes
- Refuse containers: No
- Toilet facilities: Yes
- Campfire pit/ring: No

Visitation: Vehicle counter data shows the highest use between October and April (Figure 22). Of the 17 deployed vehicle traffic counters in the Safford Field Office, this site has the highest average daily traffic. The yearly traffic trends show 2023 exceeding each of the previous three

years by at least 25%. Based on park ranger observations, the site typically sees 20-30 groups at any given time during the busy months of the year.

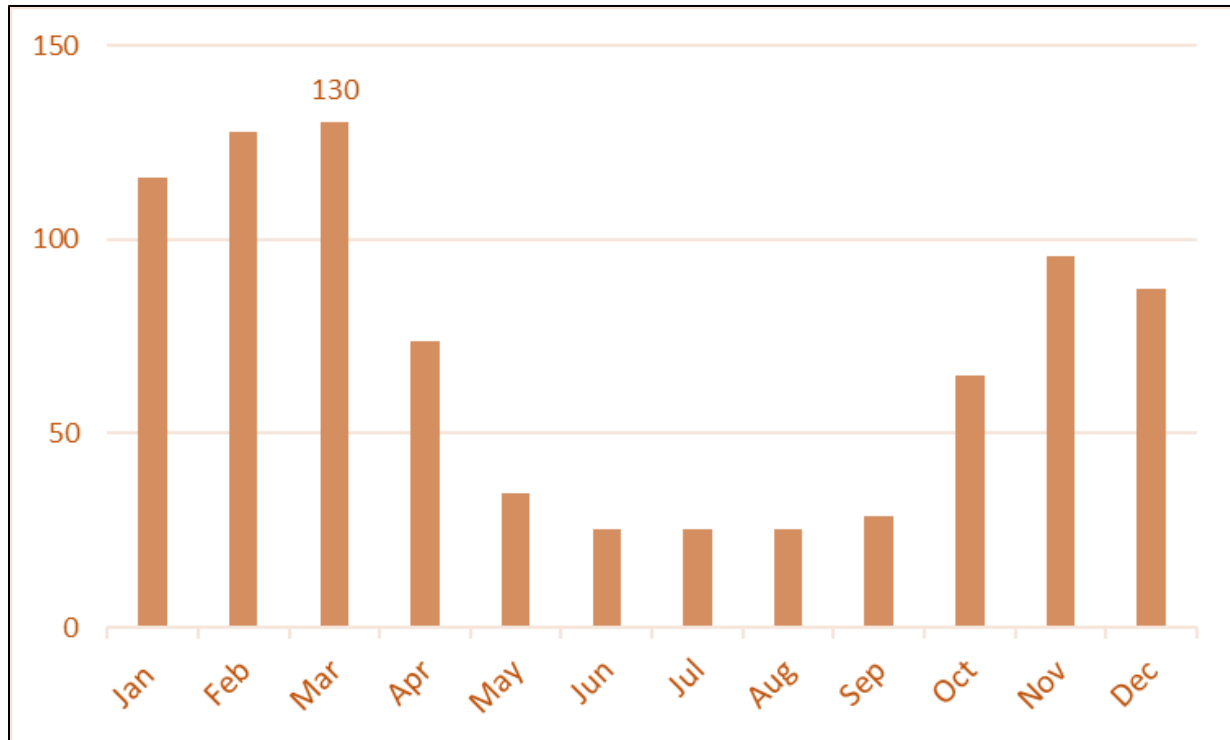


Figure 22: Indian Bread Rocks Recreation Area Monthly Traffic Totals for 2023

Fees: This site has no established fee and is being proposed as a new expanded amenity recreation fee site. The proposed fee type would be an expanded amenity of \$15.00 per site, per night. The fee would cover two vehicles per site with an additional \$5.00 per vehicle as space allows at each site.

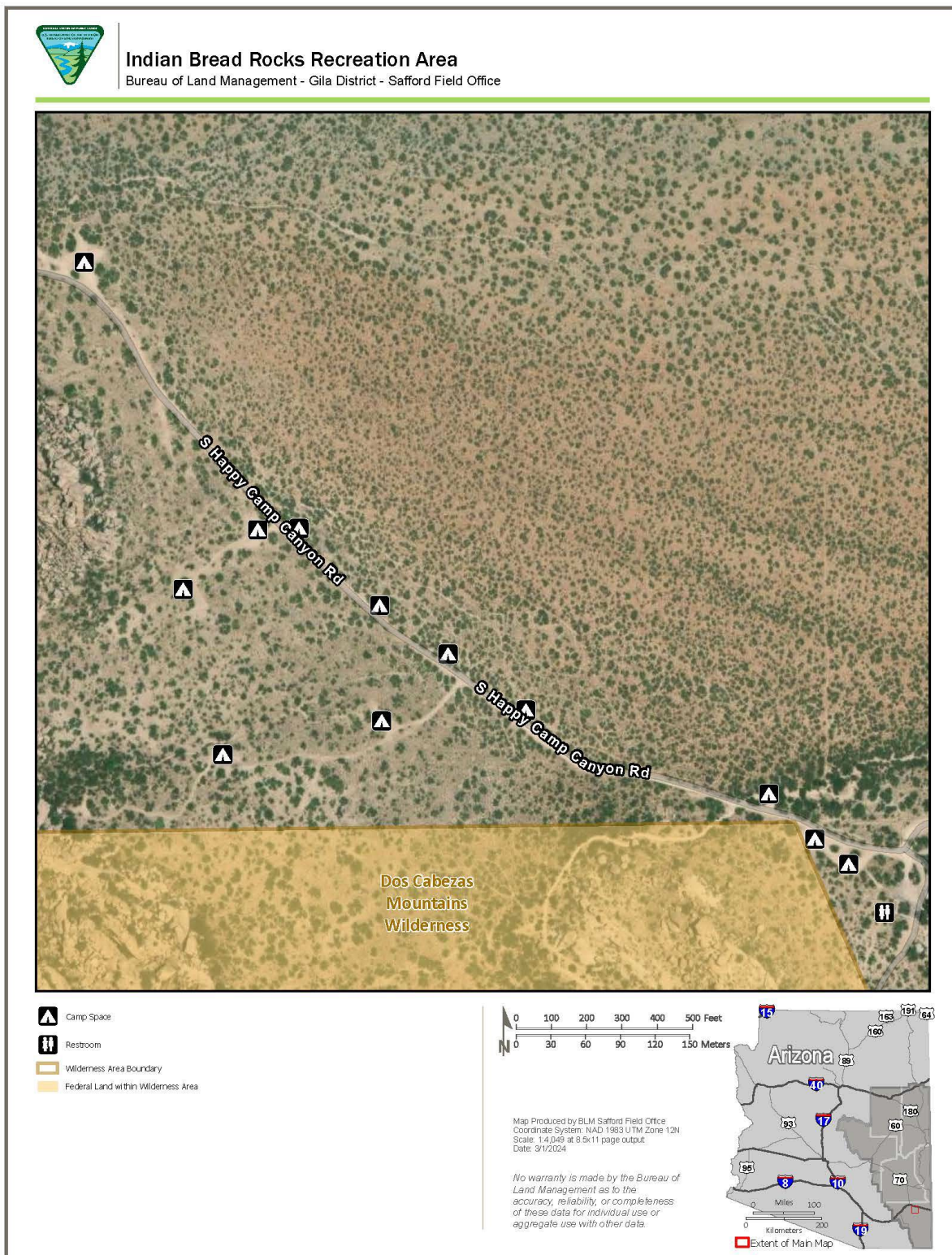


Figure 23: Indian Bread Rocks Recreation Area Map

5 Proposed Modifications to Recreation Fee Rates

This fee proposal includes increases to all expanded amenity, ISRP, and site-specific pass fees across the field office. In addition, the fee proposal includes establishing a new expanded amenity fee site at the Indian Bread Rocks Recreation Area (IBRRA) and modification of the fee type at the HWDRA to an ISRP. Fees at most of these sites have not seen increases since 1999.

The SFO will ensure that the creation of a new developed campground at the IBRRA proceeds in compliance with the local land use plan, proper environmental analysis, and fulfillment of FLREA requirements for an expanded amenity recreation fee site. Design and construction of the campground, the installation of campsite amenities (tent or trailer spaces, picnic table, fire ring, grill), an information kiosk, and refuse containers would occur before the proposed fees are implemented.

Table 6: Proposed Modifications to Existing Recreation Fees

| Existing or Proposed Fee Site/Area | Current Fees | Proposed Modified or New Fees |
|--|---|--|
| Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness | \$5.00 person (day or overnight use) | \$12.00/person (day or overnight use) |
| Fourmile Canyon Recreation Site | \$5.00 night (w/two vehicles) \$2.00 per additional vehicle | \$15.00/night (w/two vehicles) \$5.00/additional vehicle |
| Hot Well Dunes Recreation Area | \$3.00 vehicle (day or overnight use) \$30.00 vehicle annual pass (day or overnight use) | \$15.00/vehicle (day or overnight use) \$80.00/vehicle annual pass (day or overnight use) |
| Gila River Boat Put-In | \$3.00 person (up to 5-day trip) | \$8.00/person (up to 5-day trip) |
| Owl Creek Campground | \$5.00 night (w/two vehicles) \$2.00 per additional vehicle | \$15.00/night (w/two vehicles) \$5.00/additional vehicle |
| Riverview Campground | \$5.00 night (w/two vehicles) \$2.00 per additional vehicle | \$15.00/night (w/two vehicles) \$5.00/additional vehicle |
| Indian Break Rocks Recreation Area (Proposed) | None | \$15.00 night (w/two vehicles) \$5.00/additional vehicle |

5.1 Fee Free Days and Interagency Pass Discounts

Authority for the establishment of “fee-free” days stems from the FLREA (16 U.S.C. 6804(e)), which authorizes 5 agencies to establish fee-free days on the lands they manage. These agencies include the BLM, Bureau of Reclamation, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife and the U.S. Forest Service. For the BLM, “fee-free” days refer to the waiver of standard amenity fees and day-use fees only (i.e., visitor centers, picnic/day use areas and National Conservation Lands

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units where fees are charged). Expanded amenity fees and other fees (i.e., group day use, overnight camping, cabin rentals, and individual special recreation permits for use of special areas) will remain in effect unless the Authorized Officer (AO) determines it is appropriate to waive them. Below outlines the locations where the AO has determined it appropriate to waive fees on “fee-free” days at all campgrounds and the HWDRA as part of this planning effort. However, the AO may adjust “fee-free” day applicability in the future and will provide notification to the public of changes through news releases or other communications.

- **Fee-free Days are applicable at:** Fourmile Canyon Recreation Site, Hot Well Dunes Recreation Area, Owl Creek Campground, Riverview Campground, and the proposed Indian Break Rocks Recreation Area.
- **Fee-free Days are not applicable at:** Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness and the Gila River Boat Put-In.

The FLREA also established an interagency national pass known as the “America the Beautiful—the National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass” (ATB) which covers fees at certain BLM locations and entrance fees to units of the NPS and the National Wildlife Refuge System. There are six types of ATB passes: Annual, Military, Every Kid Outdoors (4th grade), Senior, Access, and Volunteer. Any of the six ATB Passes may provide the bearer full coverage of the standard amenity recreation fee and certain ATB Passes provide some coverage for expanded amenity recreation fees at fee sites on public lands. Fees not subject to coverage or discount with the ATB passes typically include special areas which require an ISRP such as Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness and the Gila River Boat Put-In.

In accordance with guidance for the applicability of interagency passes, where expanded amenity recreation fees or ISRPs are charged, the AO has determined it appropriate to allow the use of Access and Senior passes for a 50% discount of expanded amenity campsite fees for all campgrounds in the SFO, which would also apply to one special area of HWDRA. The HWDRA was determined to be appropriate by the AO to apply the ATB discount to the ISRP because the special area contains a 14-unit campground and two hot tubs which were formerly administered as a standard amenity fee.

- **Senior and Access Passes are applicable at:** Fourmile Canyon Recreation Site, Hot Well Dunes Recreation Area, Owl Creek Campground, Riverview Campground, and the proposed Indian Break Rocks Recreation Area.
- **Senior and Access Passes are not applicable at:** Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness and the Gila River Boat Put-In.

No other passes (i.e. Annual, Military, 4th Grade, Volunteer) can be applied to receive discounts at other fee sites or special areas in the field office.

5.2 Fee Collection Digitization Efforts

The Safford Field Office will begin to incorporate various e-commerce technologies, as directed in BLM Instruction Memorandum 2022-010, to provide recreation visitors opportunities to find, reserve and pay for campsites and permits within the field office. Most of these options are

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provided through the interagency reservation service Recreation.gov. If the SFO decides to add additional reservation services using other types of e-commerce options available in the future, an expanded amenity fee for reservation services would be charged in addition to any other standard or expanded amenity fees in accordance with 16 U.S.C. 6802(g)(2)(G).

Reservation services fees could range from \$0.50 to \$10.00 per transaction depending on the type of service provided. The reservation service is subject to contracting requirements and will be adjusted with contract changes or with future updates to the business plan. For visitors who wish not to use reservation services, or pay the expanded amenity fee associated with them, the field office will attempt to continue to provide a blend of reservation and first come-first served options until or unless the office moves the fee site/area entirely to e-commerce. Other payment options may also be considered in the future as technology and software develops, such as onsite credit card payment or “scan and pay” systems.

5.3 Model for Future Fee Adjustments

BLM’s permit and fee policy recommends the use of an index for routine fee adjustments, rather than reviewing each individual adjustment through a comprehensive business plan effort that requires a tremendous investment of effort and time. The SFO proposes to utilize a model for future fee increases tied to the consumer price index for all urban consumers (CPI-U). The U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics (BLS) defines the CPI-U as “a measure of the average change over time in the price paid by urban consumers for a market basket of consumer goods and services” (bls.gov/cpi). The CPI-U is the broadest and most comprehensive CPI. The all-urban consumer group included in the CPI-U represents over 90 percent of the total U.S. population (<https://www.bls.gov/cpi/questions-and-answers.htm>). According to the BLS in 1999, which was the year most of our sites began charging fees, the average annual value of the CPI-U was 166.6; by May 2024 it had climbed to 314.069, an increase of about 86%.

The BLM is seeking approval to exercise the option to increase each fee by 20%, rounded up to the nearest dollar, when there is a 20% increase in the CPI-U from the date this business plan is approved. The first adjustment would result in an increase of the Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness fee to \$15, Fourmile Canyon Recreation Site to \$18, Gila River Boat Put-In to \$10, Hot Well Dunes Recreation Area to \$18 and the annual pass to \$96, Owl Creek Campground to \$18, Riverview Campground to \$18, Indian Bread Rocks Recreation Area of \$18, and campsites with more than two vehicles to \$6 per additional vehicle beyond two as space allows at each campsite.

This model would ensure the fees evolve in tandem with the ever-changing environment of the future and increasing costs.

6 Operating Costs

The 2023 Operating Costs for SFO recreation sites with labor and operational expenses were estimated at \$318,422. The 1711 (National Conservation Area Management) account, which is appropriated funds tied to the management of National Conservation Lands, currently supports most of the recreation staff labor costs and day-to-day operations. The 1210 (Wilderness Management) and 1220 (Recreation Management) accounts also support labor, training, vehicle

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maintenance, lease agreements, and utilities or services. The 1232 account (Recreation Fees) supports operation of recreation facilities and upkeep of developed recreation sites, labor for ISRP monitoring, and fee processing. The 1660 (Recreation and Administrative Facilities Maintenance) account also has limited funds directed towards repairs and care of recreation and administrative facilities, such as employee and volunteer housing. All labor costs charged to the 1232 account in 2023 were for additional hours for BLM staff to assist with monitoring and maintenance of recreation sites due to vacant recreation program positions. Table 7 shows the breakdown of costs by account:

Table 7: Breakdown of Recreation Program Operating Costs for Fiscal Year 2023

| Account | Operation | Labor | Total |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Wilderness Management (1210) | \$ 9,931.76 | \$ 0 | \$ 9,931.76 |
| Recreation Management (1220) | \$ 8,501.63 | \$ 0 | \$ 8,501.63 |
| Recreation Fees (1232) | \$ 17,586.78 | \$ 10,457.54 | \$ 28,044.32 |
| Recreation and Administrative Facilities Maintenance (1660) | \$ 2,632.31 | \$ 0 | \$ 2,632.31 |
| National Conservation Area Management (1711) | \$ 92,153.70 | \$177,158.71 | \$269,312.41 |
| Total Cost | \$130,806.18 | \$187,616.25 | \$318,422.43 |

6.1 Development of Campground at Indian Bread Rocks Recreation Area

As described in Section 5 of the draft business plan, the proposed establishment of IBRRA as a developed campground would require a substantial start-up cost estimated at \$112,980 for the creation and hardening of approximately 18 campsites and the installation of site amenities (picnic tables, camping spaces, refuse collection, information kiosk, and signage). The estimate also includes the cost of two wage-grade employees and heavy equipment operation. See Table 8 for a cost breakdown. Table 9 shows annual operating costs are estimated at \$28,850 (based on an estimate calculated for Riverview Campground) to support labor for recreation and law enforcement staff, and maintenance and upkeep of the new recreation site.

Table 8: Estimated Start-Up Cost for Establishment of Developed Campground at Indian Bread Rocks Recreation Area

| Amenities, Labor Needed, and (Quantity) | Estimated Costs |
|--|------------------------|
| Picnic Tables (18) | \$54,500 |
| Fire Rings and Grills (18) | \$13,680 |
| Campsite Markers (18) | \$1,300 |
| 9 Refuse Containers (9) | \$19,500 |
| Kiosks (2) | \$3,800 |

| Amenities, Labor Needed, and (Quantity) | Estimated Costs |
|--|------------------------|
| Iron Ranger Fee Tube (1) | \$1,000 |
| Heavy Equipment (21 days) | \$6,700 |
| Park Ranger Labor (6 Weeks) | \$6,300 |
| Maintenance Employee Labor (6 Weeks) | \$6,200 |
| Total: | \$112,980 |

Table 9: Estimated Annual Operating Cost at Indian Bread Rocks Recreation Area

| Estimated Expenditures | Estimated Costs |
|--|------------------------|
| Vault Toilet Pumping | \$2,300 |
| Cleaning Supplies and Equipment | \$1,000 |
| Maintenance | \$1,400 |
| Trash Pickup and Patrols | \$7,100 |
| Customer Service | \$1,150 |
| Vehicles | \$1,650 |
| Law Enforcement | \$7,500 |
| Campground Host | \$650 |
| Overhead | \$6,100 |
| Total | \$28,850 |

6.2 **Deferred Maintenance Projects in the Gila Box Riparian NCA and Hot Well Dunes Recreation Area**

The SFO was awarded funding in 2021 for two Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) projects - the Gila Box RNCA Recreation Sites and Access Roadway Reconstruction and Repairs project, and the Hot Well Dunes Facilities and Site Repairs project. The Gila Box RNCA project has been awarded \$5.4 million in funding to provide upgrades to recreation facilities and improve roads that access the sites. This project is estimated to be completed at the end of Fiscal Year 2025. The HWDRA Facilities and Site Repair project will repair various recreation facilities, restore water systems, improve wildlife habitat, and repair the main access road. The project is anticipated to receive \$5.18 million of GAOA funding with an estimated completion date of Fiscal Year 2026.

The goal of both projects is to restore and protect high-visitation areas (Figure 24), increase Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility, expand recreational opportunities, improve safety, reduce annual operating costs, and potentially promote nearby community amenities and local jobs to accommodate increased visitors. With these significant improvements to recreation facilities, the recreation program is also anticipating increased long-term maintenance costs – for example the repair of new assets such as solar arrays, backup generators, and water systems.

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Increased fees would assist with the operating costs of maintaining these upcoming improvements and upgrades into the future.



Figure 24: Example of a recreation facility in the Gila Box RNCA that will benefit from upcoming improvements.

7 Past and Future Projected Revenues

Existing fee site revenues were gathered using deposit reports generated by the BLM's Collections and Billings System (CBS). These reports show recreation funds deposited to each recreation site/area's fee account and were totaled for each year over a five-year period. An average revenue was calculated and divided by each site's current fee amount to estimate the average permit count over the same timeframe. The average permit count was then multiplied by the proposed fee at each site to yield the projected annual revenue at each existing fee site/area. These calculations do not account for interagency passes or special recreation permit revenues as those are demand driven and contribute a relatively small percentage (>15%) of annual revenue. Table 10 shows the current and projected revenues for existing fee site/areas.

Table 10: Current and Projected Revenues for Existing Fee Sites/Areas

| Existing Fee Site/Area | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 5-Year Average Revenue | 5-Year Average Permit Count | Proposed Fee | Projected Revenue |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness | \$ 50,087 | \$ 72,556 | \$ 80,663 | \$ 84,712 | \$ 72,011 | \$72,006 | 14,401 | \$12 | \$172,812 |
| Fourmile Canyon Recreation Site | \$1,799 | \$1,365.89 | \$1,321.21 | \$1,103.46 | \$1,567.80 | \$1,432 | 286 | \$15 | \$4,296 |
| Hot Well Dunes Recreation Area | \$11,609 | \$9,079.21 | \$9,331.50 | \$8,767.91 | \$9,237.95 | \$9,605 | 3,202 | \$15 | \$48,030 |
| Gila River Boat Put-In | \$455 | \$234 | \$106 | \$146.40 | \$525 | \$293 | 98 | \$8 | \$784 |
| Owl Creek Campground | \$1,176 | \$1,374.75 | \$2,192.54 | \$1,349.40 | \$1,561 | \$1,531 | 306 | \$15 | \$4,590 |
| Riverview Campground | \$2,413 | \$2,939 | \$3,381 | \$2,850.39 | \$2,215.55 | \$2,760 | 552 | \$15 | \$8,280 |
| Totals: | \$67,639 | \$87,549 | \$96,996 | \$96,129 | \$84,903 | \$86,643 | 18,845 | Site-Specific | \$238,792 |

Projected revenue for the proposed fee area at IBRRA was estimated using visitation data based on vehicle traffic counts. The numbers in Table 11 show vehicle counts from 2019 to 2023. These were used to calculate a five-year average, and then multiplied by the proposed fee amount to estimate projected revenue at the site.

Table 11: Projected Revenue for Proposed Fee Area at Indian Bread Rocks Recreation Area

| Proposed Fee Area | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | Average Vehicle Count | Proposed Fee | Projected Revenue |
|------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-----------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Indian Bread Rocks Recreation Area | 5,707 | 7,374 | 9,507 | 8,239 | 10,573 | 8,280 | \$15 | \$124,200 |

8 Priorities for Future Expenditures

The SFO's primary goal for recreation fee sites is to provide high-quality recreation opportunities and experiences for all visitors. BLM labor will continue to be the highest operating cost. Currently, minimal recreation site fee revenue is used for labor, but this may change in the future as more recreation positions are added to the program. BLM staff provide visitor information, conduct field patrols, maintain facilities, collect and reconcile fees, and

rehabilitate natural resource damage. Recreation fee revenue will continue to significantly support operation of the sites. Recreation fee site revenue will continue to be used for:

- Services and fees for garbage collection, septic pumping, water testing, and other utility costs.
- Supplies, including but not limited to, cleaning supplies, toilet paper, hand tools, paper towels, trash bags, fuel for motorized equipment, paint, lumber, etc.
- Maintenance, improvement, and replacement of recreation site infrastructure such as solar arrays, water pumps, generators, trails, grills, signage, fire rings, picnic tables, restroom buildings, etc.
- Government vehicles, utility terrain vehicles, and trailers used to implement the recreation program.
- Maps, brochures, and other interpretive materials.
- Construction of new recreational facilities.

The SFO also proposes to plan for major new investments such as service and facility enhancements, construction, and/or expansion. The SFO will strive to reserve 5% of annual revenue for major infrastructure investments identified in Table 12. This table is not comprehensive and is intended to provide an example of the types of future investments recreation revenues could fund.

Annual recreation fee revenue and fee spending plan information was used to determine an estimate for a positive fund balance amount goal for the recreation program. Based on 2021 and 2022 reports, annual average revenue from all recreation sources amounted to about \$107,000 with an average carry-over amount of \$157,000. The recreation program will strive to maintain an estimated positive fund balance of around \$120,000 annually to ensure the BLM can continue to provide seamless maintenance and services and immediately address any imminent threats to public health and safety or natural resources. It is not anticipated that much appropriated recreation program funding would contribute to priority expenditures, especially long-term projects.

Table 12: Priorities for Future Expenditures, Projects, and Proposals

| Description | Location | Projected Cost | Occurrence | Priority Level |
|--|------------------------------------|----------------|------------|----------------|
| Interagency Park Ranger Position and Vehicle | Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness | \$35,000 | Annual | High |
| Construct New Ranger Station and Contact Center | Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness | \$4,000,000 | Long-Term | High |
| Maintenance Supplies | All Fee Sites | \$14,000 | Annual | High |
| Ecommerce Solutions for Fee Collection | All Fee Sites | \$10,000 | Short-Term | High |
| Vault Toilet Pumping | All Fee Sites | \$4,000 | Annual | High |
| Develop Campground and Other Site Improvements | Indian Bread Rocks Recreation Area | \$150,000 | Short-Term | High |
| Volunteer Site Host Program | All Campgrounds | \$6,000 | Annual | High |
| Incidental Facility Repairs | SFO Wide | \$3,000 | Annual | High |
| Abandon Old and Drill New Well | Fourmile Canyon Recreation Site | \$75,000 | Short-Term | Medium |
| Signage | SFO Wide | \$12,000 | Annual | Medium |
| New Restroom | Indian Bread Rocks Recreation Area | \$50,000 | Long-Term | Low |
| Picnic Area Improvements | Indian Bread Rocks Recreation Area | \$25,000 | Long-Term | Low |
| New Shade Structures | Fourmile Canyon Recreation Site | \$50,000 | Long-Term | Low |
| Nature Trail Improvements | Hot Well Dunes Recreation Area | \$12,000 | Long-Term | Low |
| Asphalt access road | Riverview Campground | \$600,000 | Long-Term | Low |

9 Analysis of Recreation Fee Rates

The BLM sets recreation use fees and adjusts them from time to time to reflect changes in costs and the market, using the following types of data:

- (a) The direct and indirect cost to the government.

- (b) The types of services or facilities provided; and
- (c) The comparable recreation fees charged by other Federal agencies, non-Federal public agencies, and the private sector located within the service area.

-43 CFR 2933.22

To make the business case for proposed changes in fee rates, a cost recovery fee calculation method was used to show how operating costs, revenues, expected future expenditures, or expected future visitation inform the development of fee rates. This method is based on the concept that revenues should cover a program's operating costs where there are direct benefits to users. The simple calculation is made by taking the total operating costs and planned future expenditures, divided by the total number of annual permits, to determine the cost recovery fee per permit.

(Total Expenditures in 2023 + High Priority Future Expenditures) ÷ Total Number of Permits in 2023 = Estimated Cost Recovery Fee

(\$318,422.43 + \$180,000) ÷ 18,835 permits = \$26.50 per permit

The estimated cost recovery fee demonstrates that even with proposed fee changes, the SFO recreation program would still require appropriated funds to operate without incurring annual deficits. Proposed fee increases in this draft business plan averaged across all sites/areas being considered equals an average fee rate of just \$13.29, which is about half the estimated cost recovery fee of \$26.50 per permit.

Additionally, in order to comply with the FLREA (16 USC 6802(b)(3)), and to provide more context to the proposed changes in fee rates and better inform the development of fee rates, a fair market value calculation method was used to show comparable fee rates charged by public and private operators in the region. Table 13 shows comparable fees for campgrounds, off-highway vehicle (OHV) areas, and group picnic areas. Table 14 compares the special areas being considered in the draft business plan.

Analysis of comparable campgrounds shows an average fee of \$18.35 per day while the average fee for comparable OHV areas is \$10.14 per vehicle. The average fee across comparable wilderness permits is \$9.33 per person and \$47.00 per trip for comparable river floating opportunities.

The Group Day Use comparables used for the Flying W Day Use Area demonstrate average daily fee of \$35. With SFO's lowest fee of \$50 per day for a group of 50 people being well above other group day use comparables, it was determined to be unnecessary to raise fees any higher at that site.

Table 13: Comparability Analysis for Existing Standard and/or Expanded Amenity Site Fees or Proposed New Amenity Fee Sites

| Campground (and/or Day Use Area) Name | Agency or Operator | Campground and/or Other Fee(s) | Amenities Offered | Key Differences |
|---|-----------------------|---|---|--|
| Riverview Campground | BLM AZ | \$5.00 per site/per night ¹⁵ (includes two vehicles) \$2.00 for additional vehicles | 13 camp spaces, covered picnic tables, drinking water, refuse containers, toilet facilities, campfire rings | N/A |
| Owl Creek Campground | BLM AZ | \$5.00 per site/per night (includes two vehicles) \$2.00 for additional vehicles | 7 camp spaces, covered picnic tables, refuse containers, toilet facilities, campfire rings | N/A |
| Fourmile Canyon Recreation Site | BLM AZ | \$5.00 per site/per night (includes two vehicles) \$2.00 for additional vehicles | 10 camp spaces, picnic tables, refuse containers, toilet facilities, campfire rings | N/A |
| Indian Bread Rocks Recreation Area | BLM AZ | \$15.00 per site/per night (Proposed Fee) | Picnic tables, toilet facilities, campfire rings, ramadas, and refuse containers | Currently there is a day use picnic area and a vault toilet. Additional facilities are estimated to be implemented by 2027. |
| Glen Canyon National Recreation Area | National Park Service | \$30.00 Entrance/Vehicle Pass (7-days) Interagency Passes accepted. | Camping areas, fire pits, and toilets | Additional fees vary on locations within Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. Some are operated by concessionaires and camping spots can vary from \$20 (primitive) to full hook-ups \$80 (RV). |

| Campground (and/or Day Use Area) Name | Agency or Operator | Campground and/or Other Fee(s) | Amenities Offered | Key Differences |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| Roper Lake State Park | AZ State Parks | \$20.00 - \$30.00/per site Additional per-night fee for second vehicle | Three campgrounds (Hacienda, Cottonwood, Gila), campfire rings, picnic tables, toilet facilities, showers | Offer electric hookup campsites and some cabins depending on the campground. There is a visitor center and entrance fees associated with this area. |
| Riggs Flat Campground | Coronado National Forest (USFS) | \$20.00/per site \$10.00/per site with Golden Age/Access or Senior Pass | 26 campsites (tent or trailer), campfire rings, grills, refuse collection, toilet facilities | Open Seasonally (April 15 - November 14). |
| Arcadia Campground | Coronado National Forest (USFS) | \$20.00/per site \$40.00 double site \$10.00 with Golden Age/Interagency Senior/Access pass | 19 campsites (tent), picnic tables, campfire rings, food storage lockers, grills, refuse containers, toilet facilities, and drinking water | Upper Arcadia Group Camp site \$25.00 (nonelectric) |
| Bonita Canyon Campground | Chiricahua National Monument (NPS) | \$20.00/per site | 25 campsites, toilet facilities, picnic tables, refuse pickup, and drinking water. | N/A |
| Safford RV Resort | Privately Owned | \$475.00/month plus electric (about \$15.83 per day) \$10.00/per dog | Campsite, toilet facilities, showers, mailboxes, laundry facilities, pool, and spa. | Rents by the month and you must pay an additional \$100.00 to initiate the electricity. |
| Hot Well Dunes Recreation Area | BLM AZ | \$3.00 per vehicle/per day \$30.00 per vehicle annual pass | Tent spaces, picnic tables, refuse containers, toilet facilities, campfire rings | N/A |
| Kachina Mineral Springs | Privately Owned | \$15.00/visit | Hot Springs | Offers spa and massage treatments for additional fees. |

| Campground (and/or Day Use Area) Name | Agency or Operator | Campground and/or Other Fee(s) | Amenities Offered | Key Differences |
|---|--------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Knolls OHV Special Recreation Management Area | BLM UT | \$10.00 day use fee \$80.00 annual pass | Toilet facilities, access road | N/A |
| Sand Mountain Nevada OHV Area | BLM NV | \$40/for a 7-Day Pass \$90.00 annual pass | Toilet facilities, access road | Tuesday and Wednesday the fee is waived (year- round). |
| Fivemile Pass Recreation Area | BLM UT | \$10 per vehicle \$50 per vehicle annual pass | Toilet facilities, parking area, picnic site | Dispersed camping only |
| Sand Flats Recreation Area | BLM UT | \$10.00 vehicle \$5.00 bicycle or motorcycle Annual Pass - \$25.00 per night per vehicle (Campsite) | 140 campsites, 6 group sites, toilet facilities, shade structure, picnic tables, fire rings | Vehicle, bike, and motorcycle fees are 7-day passes. |
| Flying W Group Picnic Area (Day- Use) Current Fees | BLM AZ | \$50.00 for first 50 people/day \$75.00 for 50-75 people/day \$100.00 for 75-100 people/day | Picnic tables, drinking water, toilet facilities, refuse containers, large ramada (30'X40") | Additional items include horseshoe pit, sand volleyball court, and 4 large cooking grills |
| Graham County Regional Park Complex Current Fees | AZ County | \$20.00/ramada for 4 hours | Ramada, 2 tables, pedestal grill and toilet facilities | Other items may be added on to the contract for use. |
| Gomez Peak Large Group Area Current Fees | Gila National Forest (USFS) | \$40.00/per day | Parking for 50 vehicles, covered pavilion, 12 tables, pedestal BBQ grills, toilet facilities, and refuse containers | Can accommodate up to 200 people. Additional items include volleyball and horseshoe pit. |
| Little Walnut East Group Area Current Fees | Gila National Forest (USFS) | \$25.00/per day | Parking for 15 vehicles, 10 tables, 4 pedestal grills, toilet facilities, and refuse containers. | 75 people maximum. |

Table 14: Comparability Analysis for Wilderness, River, or Backcountry Special Areas

| Area Name | Agency | Wilderness, River, or Backcountry Permit Fee(s) |
|--|------------------------------|---|
| Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness | BLM AZ | \$5 per person/day or night |
| Wire Pass Day Use Paria Canyon-Vermillion Cliffs Wilderness | BLM AZ | \$6.00/per person \$6.00/per dog Permit does not cover access to any other permit area or overnight use |
| Paria Canyon Overnight Permit | BLM AZ | \$5.00 per person per day |
| Saguaro National Park Wilderness Permits | NPS | \$8.00/night |
| San Carlos Recreation and Wildlife Program | Tribal | \$10.00 per day Permit will cover a married couple with children under 17 years old |
| Grand Canyon Backcountry Permits | NPS | \$12.00 per person below rim (Jan-March) \$15 per person below rim (April-December) |
| Gila River Boat Put-In | BLM AZ | \$3.00 per person per trip Fee covers a trip length of 5 days |
| San Juan River (Sand Island to Mexican Hat) | BLM UT | \$10.00/person per trip 2–3-day length trips |
| Salt River - White Mountain Apache | Tribal | \$5.00/day for boat or watercraft \$9.00/day for vehicles \$25.00/Daily Rafting Permit/person Valid Daily Rafting permit are allowed one night of camping, with required equipment |
| Salt River Canyon Wilderness Permit | Tonto National Forest (USFS) | \$125.00 boater permit fee |
| Rouge National Wild and Scenic River Permits (Grave Creek to Watson Creek) | BLM OR | \$10.00/person per trip 3–4-day length trips |

10 Impacts of Changing and Non-Changing Recreation Fee Rates

Consistent with the Department of the Interior and BLM priorities, the BLM Safford Field Office seeks to achieve environmental justice, equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility and make a difference in Apache, Cochise, Gila, Graham, Greenlee, and Navajo County communities

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through expanding recreational access and opportunities and providing for natural resource interpretation. This includes to:

- encourage, facilitate, and improve partnership with and access for youth, tribes, and underserved communities to public lands through recreation partnerships and collaborations;
- improve public health and safety at developed recreation sites and areas by updating and modernizing infrastructure—including meeting accessibility standards for people with disabilities;
- invite education, interpretation, and recreational access for all Americans, especially for diverse populations and those near urban areas to encourage enjoyment of BLM-managed public lands and waters;
- collaborate with community members, government organizations, nonprofit organizations, academic institutions, and other stakeholders to address environmental and health-related challenges for recreation management;
- enhance understanding of environmental and health-related issues at the community level;
- improve methods for identifying, addressing, tracking, and measuring progress toward achieving environmental justice;
- and develop and support youth education and outreach programs.

10.1 Impacts of Increasing Recreation Fee Rates

With increases in visitation and recreation demand, it is vitally important for the SFO to continue to provide and improve recreational offerings for the public. It is worth noting that rises in consumer goods and services costs and the distance from urban centers to these fee sites means enjoying them already represents significant expenses, especially when many visitors are traveling from outside the local commuting area (and in many cases, from other states). A modest \$5-\$12 fee increase would likely not represent a significant financial burden or change the ability to patronize these fee sites for most visitors.

Increased fee revenue would allow the SFO to continue to provide safe, well-maintained, high-quality recreation experiences. Additional resources could also provide opportunities to expand recreational offerings and modernize current offerings. Some examples already being explored include non-cash payment options, additional campground hosts, new picnic tables and fire rings, improved information kiosks, and a new public contact station. The day use and campground facilities represent a substantial public investment, and without fee increases visitors would likely see a loss of functionality and use of these facilities. As costs continue to increase, maintenance may not happen as quickly or as often as needed, and some services may be reduced.

Fee increases could also provide benefits to the local economy. Providing high-quality recreation sites helps ensure continued visitation, reduces vandalism, and decreases maintenance costs.

Recreation and tourism contribute significantly to the local economy. Visitors to the field office spend locally on lodging, fuel, food, supplies, and other purchases. Visitors from outside the local area typically stay longer and spend more. The University of Arizona's Economic and Business Research Centre reported that in 2022, the outdoor recreation economy accounted for 2.5% of Arizona's state gross domestic product. Outdoor recreation grew at a faster pace than the overall U.S. economy in 2022 based on the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis annual report measuring the outdoor recreation economy. Arizona also had an increase of 5.8% in outdoor recreation employment in 2022. It is imperative to the local economy to keep recreation site infrastructure in good condition, clean, and serviced to high standards. Maintaining these high standards and creating new opportunities improves the overall recreational experience for current and future visitors.

Fee increases may impact environmental justice (EJ) communities of concern near recreation sites and areas. Reflected by the 1997 Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ)'s Environmental Justice Guidance under the National Environmental Policy Act, the following five criteria are adopted for determining whether a community is an EJ community of concern.

- EJ community of concern criterion 1: minority population higher than 50%
- EJ community of concern criterion 2: minority population higher than 110% of reference area
- EJ community of concern criterion 3: low-income population higher than 50%
- EJ community of concern criterion 4: low-income population higher than 100% of reference area
- EJ community of concern criterion 5: trial communities

If at least one answer to the above 5 criteria is yes, then overall the community is an EJ community.

The five criteria were examined using data from the latest American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates published by the U.S. Census Bureau in December 2022. The census tracts level of communities were used to provide an overview for the SFO.

Among the 87 communities at the census tract level in the entire SFO, 39%, 36%, 26%, 40%, and 25% of the communities meet EJ criteria 1 through 5, respectively. The following list shows the nearest communities to the sites or areas in the draft business plan and which of the five Environmental Justice criteria they meet. The accessibility of affordable and nearby recreation opportunities may be diminished by fee increases for a generous segment of the local community.

- Bowie: 1, 2, 3, 4
- Bryce: 3
- Bylas: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
- Cactus Flats: 3, 4

- Clifton: 1, 2
- Dragoon: 3, 4
- Duncan: 3, 4
- Pima: 4
- Safford: 1, 2
- San Carlos: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
- San Simon: 4
- Sunizona: 3, 4
- Wilcox: 1, 2, 3, 4

10.2 Impacts of Not Increasing Recreation Fee Rates

The SFO recently received tens of millions of dollars in appropriated money through GAOA for the improvement of select recreation facilities. The coming upgrades to recreation facilities and roads will require continued maintenance and care to ensure a worthwhile return on investment to the public. Not increasing fees would impact the ability to upkeep significant investments, such as solar array systems and water systems, as they age over time and become in need of repairs.

In general, deferred maintenance costs increase as facilities age. Without additional revenue, some facilities may not remain open either due to safety or health concerns due to the inability to make repairs. Maintenance that is deferred because of insufficient funding may result in increased safety hazards, reduced service to the public, higher costs in the future, and inefficient operations. A worst-case scenario may be a reduction in recreation staff as there may not be sufficient funding to fill vacated positions. Loss of maintenance staff positions is already occurring, impacting the ability to utilize equipment for repair and maintenance of roads and facilities. Recreation demands will continue to increase as visitation increases. Already constrained resources will be required simply to keep up with increased demand rather than improving recreation assets. Opportunities for future planned developments would be limited and likely set aside. The SFO may experience challenges fulfilling the BLM's priorities for recreation, instead focusing only on basic sanitation and health and safety needs.

If recreation sites are not appealing to visitors, they might stop recreating in this region, thereby affecting the local economy. Negative impacts to the environment could also occur. Reductions in trash pickups and pumping of toilets may be required creating human waste and garbage impacts. Reductions may be required in recreation staff patrols providing opportunities for some visitors to act inappropriately by creating unwanted disturbance and vandalizing facilities. If visitors began to view sites as non-maintained, it could lead to a belief that these sites are not frequented at all and could exacerbate problems with dumping, vandalism, and exceeding stay limits.

11 Public Outreach

The FLREA and agency policy require BLM to complete public outreach when proposing new recreation fees or changes to existing recreation fees. The SFO has developed this draft business

plan to ensure visitors and stakeholders are appropriately engaged. The following outlines the BLM's public outreach efforts that will take place during development of the Final Business Plan, primarily during public review of the draft business plan.

11.1 Communications Objectives

- Clearly describe the scope and nature of the proposed changes to the fee program to the public.
- Provide the opportunity for users and affected stakeholders to comment on the proposal.
- Meet BLM policy requirements for informing the public about changes to fees charged under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act.

11.2 Communication Actions

- A 45-day comment period to solicit feedback from the public from September 6, 2024, to October 21, 2024.
- Press release announcing the availability of the Draft Business Plan to the greater public.
- BLM staff will meet with local stakeholders to discuss the plan and address their concerns and comments directly.
- Posting an electronic copy of the Draft Business Plan on pertinent BLM webpages and social media outlets (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Recreation.gov, etc.), as well as developing an ArcGIS StoryMap to provide information on the fee proposals.
- Physically posting a flyer with how and when to comment at each recreation site in the draft business plan.
- Mail and email copies of the Draft Business Plan to members of the public who have expressed interest in it.
- Create awareness of the availability of the plan through face-to-face contact with the public when visiting recreation sites.

11.3 Key Public Messages

- The SFO is a special place to many people, where outstanding recreation opportunities and impressive natural resources have been cherished for generations.
- The Draft Business Plan was prepared to inform the public about how the BLM is modifying the recreation fees. All fees will be used to enhance the visitor experience and protect important environments at the sites where they are collected. The Draft Business Plan will not be finalized until public input has been received and considered.
- Fee modifications have not occurred in the field office since 1999, and fee increases will help the BLM approach fair market value as identified through comparisons with private and public recreation sites.

The public may provide input through the following channels: mail or in person at 711 S. 14th Street Suite 100, Safford, AZ or by email at BLM_AZ_SFO_BusinessPlan@blm.gov.

11.4 How BLM will Utilize Public Input

Public comments received during the comment period will be evaluated by the Safford Field Office recreation staff and management team. Substantive comments will be summarized in an appendix to this document. Comments will be considered and may be used to modify the draft business plan, as appropriate.

In conjunction with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), BLM staff will continue to conduct visitor satisfaction surveys across the SFO to ensure the public has an ongoing chance to comment on current situations and management practices.

Appendices

Appendix A: Summary of Public Comments (Pending)

Draft

13 References

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